



Silence in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

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SILENCE IN THE LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON

BY
LINE KIKKENBORG CHRISTENSEN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2018



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

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CV

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

In Bhutan, old codes of secrecy are part of the political culture. This creates societal silences around politically sensitive issues such as ethnicity, citizenship and the domestic conflict of the past. This article-based thesis raises the overall question: what forms of societal silence exist in Bhutan and what consequences do they have for the political culture of the country?

Four articles answer this overall question. The article 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox'' contributes to our understanding of silence as sensitivity and how obliviousness, self-censorship and silent protests play out in the political culture of Bhutan. The article 'Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan' discusses silent diplomacy, the Bhutanese media's role in silence and the online opposition against silence from Bhutanese citizens. The article 'Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan's Monarchical Democracy' contributes with a look at how the aim of social cohesion silences ethnicity and how uniformity is silently accepted in the current political culture of Bhutan. Finally, the article 'Piecing Together Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict' illustrates how silence exists between diverse narratives of Bhutan's past creating different understandings of the present.

As a whole, the thesis paints a picture of a political culture marked by limited freedom of speech and societal silence around politically sensitive issues. The government encourages societal silence by employing silent diplomacy. Informants' fear of how authorities may punish opposition inspires careful navigation around sensitive issues. Despite societal silence in Bhutan, informants have formed a multiplicity of narratives about sensitive issues such as the domestic conflict of the 1990s. These narratives exist as parallel understandings of past and present, creating rifts in society. The thesis suggests that societal silence is increasingly questioned by Bhutanese citizens and that informants are discontent with the pre-democratic hierarchies that exist in the political culture.

This thesis draws on empirical material and inspiration from seven months of anthropological fieldwork among students at a Bhutanese college. The significance of the research undertaken in this thesis is found in the intersection of the field of research and the choice of anthropological methods. The thesis contributes to the limited scholarship on the political culture in Bhutan, and advances our understanding of Bhutan's democratic development. With its focus on silence, the thesis contributes to our understanding of this as a social phenomenon that plays a role in shaping social and political life.

DANSK RESUME

I Bhutan er hemmeligholdelse en del af den politiske kultur. Det skaber samfundsmæssige tavsheder omkring politisk følsomme anliggender såsom etnicitet, statsborgerskab og intern konflikt i landet. Denne artikelbaserede afhandling stiller det overordnede spørgsmål: hvilke former for samfundsmæssig tavshed eksisterer i Bhutan og hvilke konsekvenser har de for landets politiske kultur?

Fire artikler belyser dette spørgsmål. Artiklen 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan – 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox'' er en undersøgelse af politisk sensitivitet og udforsker hvordan uvidenhed, selv censur og protester udspiller sig i Bhutans politiske kultur. Denne artikel kvalificerer vores forståelse af tavshed i politisk kultur. Artiklen 'Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan' diskuterer tavshed som en diplomatisk strategi og udforsker bhutanesiske mediers rolle i samfundsmæssig tavshed og online modstand mod tavshed fra befolkningen. Artiklen 'Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan's Monarchical Democracy' bidrager med en afdækning af, hvordan ensformighed bliver accepteret og hvordan det samfundsmæssige mål omkring samhørighed gør etnicitet til et emne der mødes med tavshed i Bhutans politiske kultur. Artiklen 'Piecing Together Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict' viser, hvordan tavshed eksisterer mellem forskelligartede narrativer om Bhutans fortid og derved skaber forskellige forståelser af nutiden.

I sin helhed karakteriserer afhandlingen den politiske kultur i Bhutan som værende påvirket af samfundsmæssig tavshed omkring politisk sensitive anliggender og mangel på ytringsfrihed. Regeringen opfordrer til tavshed gennem deres brug af tavshed som diplomatisk strategi. Informanternes frygt for, hvordan autoriteter kan straffe de der opponerer, skaber forsigtig navigation omkring politisk sensitive anliggender. Informanter har, til trods for samfundsmæssig tavshed i Bhutan, dannet sig forskelligartede narrativer om politisk sensitive anliggender så som den interne konflikt, der udspillede sig i 1990'erne. Disse narrativer eksisterer som parallelle forståelser af fortid og nutid og skaber splittelse i samfundet. Denne afhandling viser, at bhutanesiske borgere i stigende grad sætter spørgsmålstejn ved samfundsmæssig tavshed og at informanter er utilfredse med de præ-demokratiske hierarkier som eksisterer i den politiske kultur.

Afhandlingens analyser trækker på empirisk materiale og inspiration fra syv måneders feltarbejde blandt *college* studerende i Bhutan. Forskningens unikke bidrag findes i kombinationen af afhandlingens emne og valget af antropologiske metoder. Afhandlingen bidrager til den begrænsede mængde forskning omkring politisk kultur i Bhutan og øger vores forståelse af landets demokratiske udvikling. Gennem et fokus på samfundsmæssig tavshed bidrager afhandlingen til forståelsen af dette som et socialt fænomen, hvilket påvirker socialt og politisk liv.

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Tashi Delek

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Bhutan is known as the land of the Thunder Dragon, a reference to the ferocious thunderstorms that whip through the valleys from the Himalaya. When the weather is calm Bhutan is a quiet country. As you step onto the tarmac of Paro airport, you are struck by how serene it is between the mountains that your plane has just navigated in noisy turbulence. What await you beyond passport control are taxi drivers patiently waiting, rather than loudly trying to convince you to make use of their services. Even if your hotel is on the main street of Thimphu the only noise that is likely to keep you from sleeping are the barks of stray dogs. This silence stretches into the politics of newly democratized Bhutan. Certain politically sensitive issues are not discussed openly. It is not that these issues are unimportant or that people are not affected by them, the silence exists despite this. The societal silence in Bhutan should be understood as being very similar to what Hutt has observed in Nepal: while free speech has been guaranteed in the Constitution “the exercise of these rights remained compromised by much older codes of deference and secrecy and by the insistence of the powerful that there were still certain ‘things that should not be said (...) and certain questions that could not be asked’” (Hutt, 2006: 362). Informants suggested to me that the things that should not be said and questions that should not be asked in Bhutan had to do with issues such as ethnicity, citizenship, language, religion, refugees and the domestic conflict of the past. This thesis focuses on silence around politically sensitive issues in Bhutan and asks this overall question: what forms of societal silence exist in Bhutan and what consequences do they have for the political culture of the country?

With its focus on silence, the thesis advances our understanding of this as a social phenomenon that is “a remarkably understudied issue within the social sciences” (Sheriff, 2000: 114), despite silences playing a role in shaping social and political life (:118). The thesis contributes to our understanding of how society is affected by silence by approaching silence as a multifaceted phenomenon with diverse consequences for the political culture and people in a society. The thesis contributes to the limited scholarship on the current political culture in Bhutan. The challenges that the Bhutanese democracy faces have been established in other research on Bhutan and through rankings¹. However, as Hutt notes we need “a more nuanced, complex and holistic picture of this fascinating society” (Hutt, 2017: 26). Very little research has focused on how the political culture is experienced by the Bhutanese people and what role silence plays in everyday life. The thesis ultimately aims to advance our understanding of Bhutan’s democratic development; with its focus on silence around politically sensitive issues this thesis fills a gap in research focused on Bhutan. The work undertaken in this thesis also focuses on how societal silence and social memories impact on political culture and how citizens contribute to silence, reproduce social memories and use different versions of the past. The conclusions lend themselves not only to further analysis of Bhutan’s democratic

development, but to exploration of silences found in other political cultures. The thesis invites us to consider how silence shapes the political cultures we encounter, and reflect on what place silence can have in societies priding themselves in being democratic and how citizens contribute to certain silences.

This thesis explores the forms societal silence takes and what consequences silence has by drawing on empirical material from anthropological fieldwork in Bhutan. In the period 2013–2015 I undertook seven months of fieldwork in Bhutan². My informants were students at a Bhutanese college: mainly social science and media students born in the years 1992–1996. During my fieldwork I employed a range of qualitative research techniques and conducted 39 individual interviews and 22 focus group interviews with a total of 75 informants. This will be elaborated on in the methodology chapter, which focuses on the field site, informants, methods, ethical concerns and limitations.

As a whole the thesis argues that a censorship regime exists in Bhutan and a number of political issues have been established as sensitive in this regime. The government encourages societal silence by employing silent diplomacy as a pattern of reaction both domestically and internationally. Because of its dependency on the government, the Bhutanese media accepts this silence and follows suit. Informants' fear of how authorities may punish anyone in open opposition inspires silence on these issues in the form of careful navigation around them. My informants experience free speech as limited and employ silence in the form of self-censorship in both private and public. The silence on issues such as conflict and ethnicity should be understood as rooted in the emphasis on uniformity and social cohesion in the monarchical democracy of Bhutan. Despite this silence, young Bhutanese have formed a multiplicity of narratives about sensitive issues such as the conflict of the 1990s³. Silence lets diverse understandings of society coexist unchallenged in Bhutanese society; thus societal silence leads to some informants experiencing living in a peaceful society while others experience their lives as marked by conflict. The societal silence is increasingly questioned by Bhutanese citizens online, both in anonymous protests and in open questioning of the forms of silence employed by the government and media. All these findings are argued for and elaborated on in the four articles. A coherent discussion of the overall question can be found in the cross-article discussion of the research findings in Chapter 5.

1.1. BHUTAN

Bhutan is a small landlocked country located in an important geostrategic position between the two giants of China and India (Kharat, 2004; Walcott, 2011a). Despite a small population of 779,666 (National Statistics Bureau, 2017), Bhutan can be characterized as a multi-ethnic, -cultural, -lingual and -religious country with three major ethnolinguistic groups (Giri, 2004). Historically, the Dzongkha-speaking Ngaling resided in north-western Bhutan, the Tshangla-speaking Sarchhop in the

east and the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa in the south along the Indian border⁴. The majority of the first two groups practise Buddhism⁵, while the majority of the Lhotshampa practise Hinduism⁶. The gradations of citizenship currently used in Bhutan place a significant number of Lhotshampa in a liminal legal space without full Bhutanese citizenship, which influences their civil rights (Whitecross, 2009). According to Human Rights Watch (2007), Lhotshampa face discrimination regarding employment, education and citizenship. This is not debated in Bhutanese politics and is also currently silently accepted by the Lhotshampa population.

The unification and formation of the state of Bhutan is attributed to the Tibetan Buddhist lama Ngawang Namgyal who arrived in the area of Bhutan in 1616. A theocracy was established under him and continued until the introduction of monarchy in 1907. Under the third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who ascended the throne in 1952, Bhutan saw a rapid process of modernization (Ueda, 2003: 143). During this process of social, economic and political development a sense of cultural vulnerability manifested itself. Increasingly – and especially in the 1980s – the language, dress and etiquette of the Ngalung elite was promoted as the Bhutanese culture through various programmes (Whitecross, 2017: 121). This promotion was motivated by the idea that Bhutan's unique cultural identity was “its defining strength for its sovereignty” (Phuntsho, 2013: 279). The programmes and limitations of citizenships created tension between authorities and the Lhotshampa population. The tension erupted into violence and in 1990 Lhotshampas started fleeing Bhutan. Approximately 100,000 ended up leaving over the next two years (DeGooyer, 2014: 94). Even though bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan were initiated in 1993, the Bhutanese refugee situation remained unresolved (Hutt, 1996a). Since 2007 the refugees have been offered resettlement in third countries, as there is still no hope of repatriation and Nepal refuses to integrate the refugees. With no reconciliation or acknowledgement, the conflict has become a cultural taboo in Bhutan: surrounded by silence as it is avoided by media, researchers, politicians and the Bhutanese people.

In 2008 Bhutan made the formal transition to democracy despite a notably lack of open demand for this political change⁷. Bhutan now has a bicameral Parliament⁸, with a 25-seat National Council and a 47-seat National Assembly (Freedom House, 2016). To date the country has conducted two elections for National Assembly: the first in 2008⁹ where the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa party won 45 of the total of 47 parliamentary seats and the second in 2013 where the opposition party, the People's Democratic Party, won 32 of the seats. The current National Assembly will be dissolved 1 August 2018 and a 90 day election period for the 2018 primary and general election rounds will commence. On 20 April 2018 Bhutan had its third election for the National Council. Even though elections generally meet international standards (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2008: 3) Bhutan remains a limited democracy: the Bhutanese monarchy continues to play an important role in the political sphere; the freedom to voice diverse party lines are

limited by the inclusion of Gross National Happiness¹⁰ in the constitution; there is a lack of access to information; there is limited freedom of speech; a political censorship exists and there is a societal silence about sensitive issues such as discrimination and conflict. Furthermore, the Bhutanese media struggles with fragility and has challenging working conditions that encourage silence about sensitive issues. The literature review will offer a further introduction to Bhutan's transition to democracy, the monarchical democracy of Bhutan, the political culture in Bhutan and the conflict of the 1990s.

1.2. THE THESIS

This will be an article-based thesis and four articles will make up the main body of it. The four articles shine a light on the overall question from different angles but with a common aim of furthering our understanding of societal silence and the political culture of Bhutan. The four articles stand as independent pieces of work. The first and second articles presented in Chapter 4 are, however, closely related. While the article 'Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan' can be read as a stand-alone piece of research, it is also a continuation of the argument found in the first article, 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox''. The article about Doklam adds two important elements to the argument found in the latter mentioned article. Firstly, it examines a current example of the silence discussed in the freedom of speech article and thus provides insight into how informants come to understand issues as sensitive. Secondly, the article about the Doklam conflict discusses public opposition using material from social media – something empirical material from the fieldwork did not allow me to discuss in the freedom of speech article. Please note that the article 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox'' uses the term 'non-discourse' instead of 'societal silence'; these terms should be understood as being interchangeable.

Chapter 1 has now presented the overall research question for the thesis and provided a short introduction to Bhutan. Chapter 2 is a literature review; it touches upon two different bodies of literature, which are cross-cutting and essential for the whole thesis. Chapter 3 is the methodological chapter of the thesis and will focus on the fieldwork conducted in Bhutan. The chapter is written with inspiration from anthropological traditions of offering details in order to ensure transparency. In Chapter 4 the abstracts of the four articles will be presented. Due to copyright issues the four articles are not included in their full length. Members of the PhD assessment committee have been provided with the articles as extra appendices in their version of the thesis. Chapter 5 will offer a cross-article discussion of the research findings and a coherent answer to the problem formulation. It is written in a style that supposes that the reader has read the four articles. While Chapter 5 is concluding in nature, Chapter 6 will offer additional concluding reflections.

Endnotes for Chapter 1

¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018) categorizes Bhutan as a hybrid regime and Freedom House (2018) categorizes Bhutan as Partly Free.

² My seven months of fieldwork were conducted in three visits: 1 November to 18 December 2013, 12 January to 20 March 2014, and 7 March to 28 May 2015.

³ I refer to the domestic conflict as taking place in the 1990s because – as with many conflicts – uncertainty about the dates exists. The conflict as a whole is not very well documented and my choice of words reflects this. A website dedicated to the experiences of Bhutanese refugees chose similarly vague words when stating “The Bhutanese refugees first entered Nepal at the end of 1990” (Bhutanese Refugees, 2018). Sinha discussed the immediate aftermath of the conflict in publications reviewing societal developments in Bhutan in 1993 and 1994 (1994, 1995). From these it is clear that unrest, violence and conspiracy speculations continued after the refugee flow had stopped. Sinha notes that the conflict at this point continues to be “the most significant political issue in the country” (Sinha 1995: 166).

⁴ In present-day Bhutan, the geographical divisions are less sharply defined due to migration (as discussed by Ansari [2017: 70]). However, many Bhutanese express a strong attachment to (and have continued ownership of) the land of past generations even if they reside in a different part of the country.

⁵ The Dzongkha-speaking Ngalung of north-western Bhutan practise Drukpa Kagyu Buddhism and the Tshangla-speaking Sarchhop of the east practise Nyingmapa Buddhism.

⁶ A minority within each ethnic group follow other religions than those associated with their ethnicity.

⁷ There was a notably lack of open demand for democratic development in Bhutan, as highlighted by Turner et al.: “There were no elite pacts, no traces of regime disunity, no economic crisis, no international pressure and no popular mobilization for democratic rights. The elements that normally contribute to the decline and fall of authoritarian rulers were absent in Bhutan. In fact, the conditions seemed more appropriate for maintaining the status quo. The state was strong, society compliant and the legitimacy of the monarchical regime was undisputed.” (Turner et al., 2011: 201). Bothe (2015) suggests that this analysis: “neglects the influence of Bhutan’s powerful neighbour and its interest in democratizing the country, which can hardly be understated (...) India’s aid to Bhutan increased by 50% at the initiation of the constitutional process. In addition, India gave Bhutan full sovereignty over its external affairs in 2008 when the constitution was inaugurated, and continues to be

its most generous donor.” (2015: 1342). Furthermore, Bothe argues that the analysis by Turner et al. neglects the “unspoken demands for change” (2015: 1342) in Bhutan.

⁸ Members of both the National Council and National Assembly serve five-year terms. Five members of the National Council are appointed by the King, the remaining 20 are elected. All members of National Assembly are elected and the head of the majority party serves as Prime Minister (Freedom House, 2016).

⁹ A European Union Election Observation Mission was invited to observe the election for National Assembly in 2008. The mission notes that the election “marks a successful and orderly change of political system in Bhutan.” (European Union Election Observation Mission 2008: 3)

¹⁰ Bhutan’s development has continuously been guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness: a development strategy that emphasizes the emotional and spiritual well-being of the people and the commitment to preserving Bhutan’s cultural heritage and natural environment (Mathou, 1999). Gross National Happiness is based on the conviction that man is bound by nature to search for happiness and that happiness can be realized as a societal goal (Thinley, 2009). Gross National Happiness has four pillars: sustainable and equitable socio-economic development; conservation of the environment; preservation and promotion of culture; and promotion of good governance. These four pillars have been translated into nine domains and 72 indicators in the effort to measure and develop Gross National Happiness. The development philosophy has attracted much positive attention from around the world.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter is also presented – in different or shorter versions – in the four articles of the thesis. This is a consequence of producing a thesis where each article needs to be able to stand alone.

There are two bodies of literature that this thesis wishes to contribute to: the body of social science research focused on Bhutan and the body of research focused on societal silence. Thus, there is both a geographical area and a theoretical area that are relevant to include in the literature review. The theoretical literature review will also include work on social memory. This thesis does not directly aim to advance our understanding of concepts within this field; a review of them is included to discuss key vocabulary and definitions that the thesis works with. In Chapter 5 it will be discussed how the thesis as a whole contributes to research areas presented in this chapter.

2.1. SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH FOCUSED ON BHUTAN

This part of the review will provide an overview of four topics that the body of social science research focused on Bhutan engages with: Bhutan's transition to democracy; the monarchical democracy of Bhutan; the political culture in Bhutan; and the conflict of the 1990s. These topics have been chosen for review because they are relevant to the four articles. It will be identified where gaps in the literature exist and, to conclude this part of the review, it will be discussed how this thesis aims to address these gaps.

2.1.1. BHUTAN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

In 2008 Bhutan had its first election for the National Assembly. The transition to democracy is significant for my thesis because it provides the backdrop against which discussions of free speech, authorities and democratic transparency should be understood. Bhutan's transition to democracy can be understood in two ways: as a process where liberal democratic institutional reforms were added to Bhutan's already existing local form of democracy or as a process that has done little to change a fundamentally authoritarian society. Masaki subscribes to the first understanding, and suggests that the democratic development dates back to the third King, who created a national assembly in 1953 (Masaki, 2013: 48). The liberal democratic changes are understood as supplementary to this existing monarchical democracy. Masaki (2013) suggests that the existing democratic features of the monarchy were seen when the fifth King took an active part in ensuring public involvement in the writing of the new constitution (2013: 59). As a subscriber to the

latter understanding, Bothe argues that the democratic reforms in Bhutan promote a form of governance that employs Western management techniques fused with an understanding of social order where values of equality, freedom and popular control are not dominant (Bothe, 2011: 30–31). According to Bothe, the monarchy has remained a dominant factor of power (2015) and former discourses on authority are reproduced while citizens are expected to remain loyal subjects instead of democratic participants (2012).

While I agree with Masaki on the need to explore the Bhutanese democracy on its own terms instead of evaluating it against standards of Eurocentric liberal democracy (2013: 62), I believe that many important discussions are neglected if we simply accept the Bhutanese society as inherently democratic. Therefore, I lean towards Bothe's more critical reading of the transition to democracy. In large parts I agree with Bothe's analysis of the power structures in the country, but believe that her work overlooks agency and the shift in expectations that the transition to democracy has brought with it. Both Masaki and Bothe work from the assumption that the introduction of democracy has come with institutional reforms, but little shift in power structures. While I concur, this conclusion is missing a vital reflection on how the transition has opened up the possibility of imagining a different power structure. The body of social science literature focused on Bhutan has a blind spot here: there are a number of scholars commenting on how the larger structures of Bhutan's society were impacted upon by transition to democracy (Dessallien, 2005; Sinpeng, 2007; Muni, 2014), but a gap exists when it comes to understanding how the transition has altered expectations regarding power, authorities, freedom and civil liberties among the population.

2.1.2. THE MONARCHICAL DEMOCRACY OF BHUTAN

In Bhutan's transition to democracy neither the power of religion nor the power of monarchy was diminished (Masaki, 2013: 49). The King is now head of state and is in this way repositioned "in a concrete, dignified, and elevated position of power" (Bothe, 2015: 1339) where he has gained new legitimacy domestically and in the international community (Miyamoto, 2017: 95, 101). Buddhism is identified as the spiritual heritage of the country in the Constitution. This monarchical and religious nature of Bhutan's democracy is significant for this thesis because the restrictions such a system entails are fundamental for understanding how the people who live within it understand their democratic freedoms.

One way that the monarchical nature of Bhutan's democracy is expressed is in the inclusion of Gross National Happiness in the Constitution: it was invented by the fourth King and is Buddhist in nature (Masaki, 2013: 52–53). Another way the monarchical nature can be seen is through the societal emphasis on *Driglam Namzha* (traditional Bhutanese etiquette). *Driglam Namzha* dictates how to serve, sit and eat

at ceremonies, and provides guidelines for wearing the national dress and instructions on how to receive guests, gifts and blessings (National Library of Bhutan, 1999). It has its roots in the monasteries and originally only applied to officials but has since spread out to the general public (Whitecross, 2002: 93–94). While Gross National Happiness attracts much scholarly interest (Ura, 2005; Evans, 2006; Pennock & Ura, 2011; Chopel, 2012; Wangmo & Valk, 2012; Givel, 2015; Munro, 2016), *Driglam Namzha* is more relevant for this thesis because it is instrumental to a larger degree in discussions about authority, freedom and hierarchies in Bhutan.

Bothe argues that *Driglam Namzha* is promoted in a highly hierarchical way and therefore is not easily compatible with democratic ideals of political equality and individual freedom. It is suggested that the social order inscribed in *Driglam Namzha* is one that emphasizes obedience and loyalty rather than free contestation (Bothe, 2011: 361–371, 2017: 62). Among other ways, we see this when *Driglam Namzha* prescribes that citizens must be dressed in national dress at formal occasions, with *kabneys* (ceremonial scarfs) that display their rank in society (Bothe, 2017: 60, 2015: 1350). Whitecross also notes the unfortunate way *Driglam Namzha* has been promoted in the past, which made it “one of the most problematic and polarising features of Bhutanese culture” (Whitecross, 2017: 115). However, it is suggested that the strong encouragement to embrace *Driglam Namzha* has declined and public interest in it has dropped as democratization has “transformed the markers of consensus” (Whitecross, 2017: 130). Whitecross further notes that *Driglam Namzha* remains part of ceremonial life and that many young Bhutanese consider the national dress an important symbol of their cultural heritage (2017: 130).

Whitecross and Bothe have similar understandings of the values inscribed in *Driglam Namzha*, but see the emphasis on, and pressure to accept, these values differently. This difference in the view on the etiquette could be understood as a consequence of approaching the field of Bhutan with different projects: Whitecross focused on the relationship between social values and the development of the legal system while carrying out fieldwork between 1999 and 2001; Bothe focused on whether local government held the potential for promoting empowerment of marginalized sections of society in her 2005 fieldwork. With this focus Bothe emphasized the poor and women, while Whitecross’s informants included monks, members of the judiciary, members of the Armed Forces and the police. These sections of Bhutanese society would experience *Driglam Namzha* differently and hence dissimilarities in conclusions about *Driglam Namzha* arise. I agree with Bothe’s view that democratic ideals and the values found in *Driglam Namzha* are at odds with each other. However, my informants were – like Whitecross’s – willing participants in the etiquette. The etiquette is understood as an important national symbol by my informants, and I would suggest that it does not instil the level of obedience and loyalty that Bothe found. The body of social science literature

focused on Bhutan has mainly opted to discuss the features of monarchical democracy through the example of Gross National Happiness. Thus, *Driglam Namzha* emerges as an understudied feature of the Bhutanese society. The attempts to enforce the etiquette in the 1980s and their connections to the ethnic conflict of the 1990s have been explored in research focused on the conflict, but *Driglam Namzha*'s current forms and influence on Bhutanese society today represent an area where further research is needed.

2.1.3. THE POLITICAL CULTURE IN BHUTAN

Bhutan can be characterized as a hybrid regime (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018) that combines democratic and authoritarian elements (Diamond, 2002). The hybrid nature of Bhutan's democracy can be found in its weak political culture, lack of protection of civil liberties and low levels of freedom of press. By characterizing Bhutan as a hybrid regime the term 'transitional democracy' is avoided. This term was popular with scholars in the 1990s, but in many cases it is not an accurate description of regimes since it carries connotations of linear movement towards democracy (Carothers, 2002). Alongside many other scholars I believe that much can be gained by acknowledging that a hybrid nature can be a sustainable situation for many countries (Diamond, 2002; Ekman, 2009; Bogaards, 2009).

The political culture of Bhutan is a central focus of this thesis: the discussions and articles all aim – in different ways – to advance our understanding of the way informants interact with this culture. As Pye notes, political culture is an elusive concept and its popularity quickly made it vague and empty (1972: 287). To address this potential emptiness of the concept I will adopt a definition inspired by Pye. Political culture is understood in this thesis as the system of views, knowledge and values that: “imparts meaning and even gives substantial structure to the political system” (Pye, 1972: 293). Political culture will be understood as a term that conceptually bridges the gap between macro- and micro-analysis of politics by focusing on “the complex processes of political socialization by which political systems maintain their continuity and individuals learn how to perform appropriate political roles” (Pye, 1972: 290). With this definition of political culture both authorities and citizens are identified as relevant for the thesis; views on diverse topics such as freedom of speech, hierarchies and social cohesion are understood as important to consider; indifference towards politics, self-censorship, narratives, social memories and practices in public and private are considered to be within the realm of interests with this definition of political culture.

Scholarly attention has been given to different aspects of the political sphere in Bhutan over the years. However, some notable publications (Aris, 1994; Ura, 1994; Mathou, 1999, 2004; Ueda, 2003) are less relevant to the discussion of the current political culture because Bhutan has been through a process of development – including a democratization process and growth of media – that has impacted on the

political sphere. More recent work that comments on the political culture – that of Muni (2014), Miyamoto (2017) and Schmidt (2017a) – is therefore selected for review here.

Muni sees the political culture in Bhutan as dominated by royal guidance (with political parties and politicians taking their cues from the current King and his father) but suggests that this guidance has directed Bhutanese democracy “along desirable lines” (2014: 160). According to Muni, the political culture is also characterized by the notion that Bhutan “urgently needs a stronger and feistier media. Deference and conformism linger, with sensitive and controversial issues still not sufficiently aired” (2014: 162). On the other hand, Muni suggests that highly sensitive issues – such as the use of Dzongkha (Bhutan’s national language), issues of governance and public morality – are being openly discussed “with a frankness that was unknown during the predemocratic period” (2014: 162).

Miyamoto argues that before democratization “a criticism of the government could be read as a criticism of the monarch, and it has created pressure on the people to exercise self-censorship” (2017: 100). This self-censorship is however declining as awareness of the democratic rights increases, experience with the new system grows and because politicians are now ‘normal people’ who depend on votes to attain office (Miyamoto, 2017: 100). Miyamoto suggests that while democratization allows Bhutanese citizens to discuss politics and social changes, the political culture is characterized by uncertainty, cautiousness, suspicion and fear (2017: 105). The political culture is furthermore marked by awareness that the democratic system can create “new spaces for conflicts, competition or divisions” (2017: 100). Miyamoto suggests that the political culture of Bhutan “praises the value of free speech in the political domain” (2017: 111). Thus, it has increasingly become possible to discuss national issues, and print media, which previously avoided strong criticism of the government, has begun to raise critical issues (Miyamoto, 2017: 109–110). However, the political culture rejects the discussion and presence of ethnic, linguistic and regional divisions in society in an emphasis on unification (Miyamoto, 2017: 110–111).

Schmidt notes that the Bhutanese government has attempted to create a national identity based on homogeneity (2017a: 2) around the dominant Ngalung elite’s customs (*Driglam Namzha*), language (Dzongkha) and religion (Buddhism) (2017a: 6). In such an ethno-nationalistic project ‘the other’ is expelled or marginalized and the multi-ethnic composition of the country becomes an issue that cannot be debated in public (Schmidt, 2017a: 2). Schmidt argues that “‘silence’ and ‘invisibility’ of opposition or competing views is a major characteristic of present-day politics in Bhutan” (Schmidt, 2017a: 3). Gross National Happiness and Bhutanization dominate the political culture and guide the development of Bhutan in an attempt “to impose order in a culturally divided society” (Schmidt, 2017b: 37). Schmidt argues

that this order not only serves domestic purposes: uniformity is also essential for Bhutan's international brand and image (2017b: 30).

Muni and Miyamoto both suggest that self-censorship is declining in Bhutan: the press is more critical and politics can be debated with a new frankness. While I accept their analysis of the notion that the current status is an improvement on the pre-democratic political culture, I would avoid using the terms 'critical' or 'frank' about public debate in Bhutan. I suggest that the press and the public are neither of those things, especially when it comes to sensitive issues. Thus, I lean towards Schmidt's characteristic of the political culture as marked by silence and a lack of opposition; Miyamoto's view that politics is marked by uncertainty, cautiousness, suspicion and fear; and Muni's suggestion that deference and conformism linger. Schmidt and Miyamoto both discuss how ethnicity is a sensitive issue in Bhutanese politics because uniformity is emphasized for the sake of unity. I agree with this analysis and aim to advance this argument in the thesis. The body of social science literature focused on Bhutan mainly discusses the political culture as a context for other issues: there is little direct focus on the culture and debate about it in and of itself. This gap in the literature is most pronounced when it comes to how the political culture is experienced, negotiated and navigated by the Bhutanese citizens.

2.1.4. THE CONFLICT OF THE 1990S

During the 1980s, Bhutan embarked on a national identity project with an essentialist underlying understanding of culture and state (Bothe, 2012). The aim was to have 'one nation, one people', which meant that the culture of the dominant Ngalung elite (as discussed above) was to be accepted by all Bhutanese (Muni, 1991: 145–47). When stricter laws of citizenship were introduced in 1985, many Lhotshampa were deemed illegal immigrants and lost their citizenship (Hutt, 2003). In 1990, ethnic tension erupted into demonstrations and violence in Bhutan. Human rights violations were committed by both rebels and the Royal Army of Bhutan (Bothe, 2011: 8). Approximately 100,000 members of the Lhotshampa ethnic minority ended up leaving the country over the subsequent two years. Amnesty International has called it "one of the largest ethnic expulsions in modern history" (2003). Rather than having a national narrative about the conflict that "legitimizes a present social order" (Connerton, 1989: 3) there is a wary silence in Bhutan. The conflict of the 1990s is not glorified in narratives of bravery and defence of the country. The events are not honoured on a national scale: no holidays are celebrated or monuments built to commemorate the events, nothing is mentioned in the school curricula or museums. The conflict is simply not part of the national narrative, and yet it is influential on Bhutanese society and democracy. Hence, it is significant for this thesis and runs as a red thread through the four articles.

While the conflict is met with silence in Bhutan, the same cannot be said of the academic sphere: a number of scholars have written about the issue (Muni, 1991;

Sinha, 1994, 1995; Hutt, 1996a, 1996b, 2003, 2005; Saul, 2000; Giri, 2004, 2005; Kharat, 2003, 2004; Rizal, 2004; Whitecross, 2009, 2011; Evans, 2010a, 2010b; Bothe, 2012; Schmidt, 2017b). The literature on the subject largely focuses on: (A) the circumstances leading to the conflict and the escalating events during the expulsion itself; (B) the Bhutanese refugees and the possibilities for repatriation; and to a limited degree (C) how the conflict is part of present-day Bhutan.

(A) Hutt has unpacked the historical roots of the conflict in several publications (1996a, 1996b, 2003, 2005, 2006). He suggests that the Lhotshampas were first integrated and welcomed in Bhutan, then assimilation was attempted and later discrimination became the Bhutanese state's approach to this ethnic group (Hutt, 2003). Finally, "the southern Bhutanese were given a choice between subscribing actively and visibly to the Drukpa cultural and political ethos or rebelling against it and losing their rights to citizenship as a consequence" (1996a: 208). Many chose to do the latter. Muni suggests that the conflict was rooted in several issues: the political, cultural and economic dominance of the Ngalung elite (and the neglect and discrimination of the Lhotshampa community); the 'one nation, one people' project, which included the promotion of a national dress, national language and etiquette; and the royal government's undertaking of a census to identify 'illegal immigrants' (Muni, 1991: 145–147). Additionally, Muni suggests that democratic development in Asia in general, and Nepal in particular, stirred up democratic aspirations of the Lhotshampa population in Bhutan. According to Muni, many of the policies implemented in the lead-up to the conflict were put in place because the Bhutanese government had observed how the Nepali population of Sikkim had played a role in the downfall of that country's monarchy and its subsequent absorption into India (Bothe, 2012: 31; Muni, 2014: 159–60).

It has been well established how different external and internal forces led to policies that marginalized the Lhotshampa population in Bhutan and created conflict. In stark contrast to this, there is little concrete evidence that provides us with details about the expulsion itself. The timeline of events is unclear. There are no agreed-upon numbers regarding how many Lhotshampa left Bhutan, no death tolls or number of injured. Pellegrini & Tasciotti also notes this lack of documentation: "Unfortunately, the details of what happened within Bhutan are obscure since domestic censorship is matched by limited access for foreigners." (2014: 107). This lack of details is not often commented on by scholars, perhaps because it can easily be misconstrued as questioning the stories of victims. I do not wish to question the truthfulness of how refugees recount the traumatic events of the conflict, but I want to highlight the fact that little documentation of the expulsion exists. While the conflict took place in an age where most countries had cameras to capture events, journalists to collect stories and researchers to secure evidence, Bhutan was still a country without television, free press and well-developed educational institutions. There are few photos from the conflict, no video evidence and no journalists who were reporting from the field while events unfolded. As researchers we must acknowledge that there is a gap in

our understanding of the conflict here. This gap could, in theory, be filled somewhat if Bhutanese citizens could share their stories, understandings and experiences of the events – not to challenge the refugee stories with understandings ‘from the other side’, but to contribute to a mosaic of narratives that together could provide a nuanced picture of the events. However, I believe that it would be impossible to undertake such a project on a larger scale in the current political environment.

(B) When Lhotshampa citizens started to flee, Bhutan refugee camps were established in five different locations in Nepal. Hutt notes that the Bhutanese government adopted a hostile attitude to these camps, maintaining that few of the people in the camps were genuine refugees from Bhutan (Hutt, 2005: 48). Hutt unpacks how the governments of Bhutan and Nepal agreed in 1993 that a committee would verify the status of the refugees in order to identify people for repatriation (Hutt, 2003, 2005). However, while bilateral talks were going on in Nepal the lands of the refugees in exile were given to other citizens back in Bhutan (Rizal, 2004: 168; Giri, 2004). The process of verification was not carried out until 2001 and results were only announced in 2003: “Having consistently denied for over a decade that the camps contained any significant number of its own people, it was pointed out, the Bhutanese government had now accepted that around 75% of the population of this first camp either were, or had once been, Bhutanese citizens” (Hutt, 2005: 50). While many refugees were identified as Bhutanese citizens, Hutt suggests that the terms for their return to Bhutan were made almost impossible to accept, both because of the hurdles set up for the application process and because of the lack of recognition of wrongdoings on the Bhutanese government’s part (2005: 51). At the time of writing, not a single refugee has returned to Bhutan, but a significant number have been resettled in third countries.

Evans conducted fieldwork in the refugee camps to explore how the Bhutanese refugees remembered the events around the conflict (2010a) and dealt with the present challenges in the camps (2010b). Evans notes that while there are two sides to the story of what happened during the conflict, both sides are not equally accepted: “in Bhutan, only one side of this story is told and accepted – the violence on the part of ‘anti-nationals’ and BPP [Bhutan People’s Party] members. While in the camps, it is the other side of the story – the government oppression – that is the dominant narrative of the past” (2010a: 40). This thesis will engage directly with this parallel narrative situation and advance our understanding of it.

Resettlement in third countries has now slowly emptied the camps and changed the debate about repatriation. The issue has lost some of its urgency and must now be understood in relation to the concept of diaspora. This has emerged as a new area of research connected to Bhutan. While there are many interesting aspects in need of scholarly attention in this emerging area, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with them.

(C) The conflict of the 1990s shows up in present-day Bhutan when the multi-ethnic composition of the country cannot be debated in public (Schmidt, 2017a: 2). It may also be part of the loyalty towards current power structures in the political culture, as suggested by Turner et al. “The only episode in contemporary history which challenged the state had an ethnic rather than elite base and possibly strengthened regime solidarity amongst the elite and population in general.” (Turner et al., 2011: 189). Whitecross alerts us to another way in which the conflict lingers in Bhutan: there are gradations of citizenship in use in Bhutan and this has placed a significant number of Lhotshampa in a liminal legal space without full Bhutanese citizenship (2009). Citizenship laws in Bhutan impact on the Lhotshampa in regard to landownership and have thus been used to control the Lhotshampa’s access to space and rights (Whitecross, 2009). Bothe suggests that the events of the 1990s “belong to the past” (2011: 8) since internal stability has been re-established in Bhutan. I agree that Bhutan enjoys stable conditions, but would challenge the idea that the conflict is in the past. In this thesis I will illustrate how I found it to be part of present-day Bhutan during my fieldwork. There is little research into this issue and the gap in the literature is most pronounced when it comes to how citizens of Bhutan understand the conflict to be part of their lives, democracy and society in general.

2.1.5. ADDRESSING THE GAPS

The literature review of the body of social science research focus on Bhutan has suggested that there are several gaps and avenues for further research:

- 1) A gap exists when it comes to our understandings of how the transition to democracy has altered the Bhutanese population’s expectations towards society.
- 2) *Driglam Namzha*’s current forms and influence on Bhutanese society represent an area where further research is needed.
- 3) There is little research that focuses directly on the political culture: this gap is most pronounced when it comes to how the political culture is experienced, negotiated or navigated by the Bhutanese citizens.
- 4) A gap exists when it comes to details about the events around the expulsion of the Lhotshampa in the 1990s.
- 5) The experiences of the diaspora of refugees resettled in third countries have emerged as a new area of research connected to Bhutan.
- 6) There is very little research into how the conflict is part of present-day Bhutan: the gap is most pronounced when it comes to how citizens of

Bhutan understand the conflict to be part of their democracy and society in general.

This thesis aims to address these gaps through four articles. Gaps 1 and 3 will be addressed in the articles ‘Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: ‘Plz Delete it from Your Inbox’’ and ‘Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan’. Gaps 1 and 2 will be addressed in the article ‘Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan’s Monarchical Democracy’. The article ‘Piecing Together Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict’ addresses gap 6 and to a limited degree gap 4. Due to my informants’ lack of first-hand experience with the conflict, addressing gap 4 in a satisfactory way is beyond the scope of this thesis. Gap 5 is also beyond the scope of this thesis, but is included here as a suggestion for an area of research where more scholarly attention is needed.

The gaps are addressed in this thesis by drawing on empirical material generated during fieldwork, as the next chapter will discuss in detail. Thus, this thesis methodologically follows a long tradition of ethnographic studies of Tibetan culture – dating back to the 1950s (Whitecross, 2002: 18). However, in Bhutan anthropological fieldwork is a more recent occurrence. The first fieldwork by trained anthropologists is accredited to Barth and Wikan, who in 1989 were commissioned by the United Nations Children’s Fund to study the situation of children in Bhutan (Penjore, 2013: 147). Pommaret (1996, 2000) was also among the first to carry out anthropological research in Bhutan. More recently scholars such as Miyamoto, Bothe and Whitecross have based their writing on experiences from anthropological fieldwork in Bhutan; however, longer fieldworks are undertaken to a very limited degree in Bhutan.

The significance of the research undertaken in this thesis is found in the intersection of the field and the methods chosen. It contributes to a body of literature aimed at critically exploring the political culture in Bhutan, and does so in a novel way by employing anthropological methods in order to present a unique point of view. The thesis contributes to the body of literature with a focus on the lives, experiences and knowledge of informants living in Bhutan. With its focus on people it distinguishes itself from research focused on societal structure; with its focus on how people residing in Bhutan experience issues it distinguishes itself from research focused on Bhutanese refugees; and with its focus on current expectations and political culture it distinguishes itself from research focused on history.

2.2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the literature review will provide an overview of the theoretical themes that the thesis engages with in the four articles. While the review of research focused on Bhutan identified gaps in the literature for the thesis to address, this review will mainly be focused on discussing the vocabulary and theories that the thesis works with.

2.2.1. SOCIAL MEMORIES

Social memory has been a popular topic in academia since the 1980s and is studied in a variety of disciplines such as philosophy, history, sociology, political science, anthropology and psychology. While influential scholars such as Evans-Pritchard, Durkheim and Marx addressed the topic of memory, most contemporary scholars within social science draw on the conceptualizations of Halbwachs, Mannheim, and Berger and Luckmann when approaching the subject of social memory. In particular, Halbwachs's insistence on framing social memory beyond history, philosophy and psychology has inspired the social sciences to pay attention to the phenomenon (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

In social memory studies there is broad support for studying social memory as representation and construction (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003: 2). Social memory should be approached as representation in the way that it refers to widely shared perceptions of the past called forward in the present, thereby linking past and present through a narration of the relationship between these two (Bell, 2006: 2). However, memory is not a reproduction of the past, but rather a construction based on contemporary contexts, beliefs and aspirations (Argenti & Schramm, 2010: 2). Memory is therefore not a passive process or a simple recall of facts but an active process, calling for its participants to engage selectively with experiences of the past. Argenti and Schramm (2010) see these constructions of the past as unstable, contested and prone to becoming sites of struggle. I adopt the suggestion of Olick and Robbins (1998) that we must explore social memory by studying the diverse ways in which societies and people are affected by the past: consciously and unconsciously, in public and private, in material and communicative forms, and in consensual and challenged ways (Olick & Robbins, 1998). I consider this definition of the area of study useful because it captures the important point that while it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act: even the most personal memories are embedded in social contexts and shaped by social factors such as language, rituals and commemoration practices (Misztal, 2005: 1321).

In this thesis the focus is on social memory in connection with politics and conflict. Bell (2006) argues that group identity requires a narrative that creates widely shared understandings of linkages between past and present; these generate a sense of belonging and loyalty to the imagined community of the nation (Bell, 2006: 5).

Despite the dominant nature of such national memory, oppositional memory does arise in opposition to it (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Groups have historically fought hard to keep oppositional memories and alternative identities available despite states attempting to silence these. According to Tint (2010b), marginalized groups and those who feel historically wronged may have a strong sense of connection to the past, while those less negatively affected by past events may be more inclined to suggest that the past is less important (Tint, 2010b).

Inspired by the ‘dynamics of memory approach’, this thesis will not subscribe to a Foucauldian dichotomy between ‘official, artificial state narrative’ and ‘authentic, oppositional memory of people’ (Argenti & Schramm, 2010; Myszal, 2003). The ‘dynamics of memory’ perspective suggests that social memory can be distorted, kept alive or constructed with no manipulative motives, thereby establishing it as something more than “an instrument of elite manipulation used to control the lower classes and minority groups” (Myszal, 2003: 68). I will still refer to these two levels of narratives – official and oppositional – because interesting mechanisms of power do exist between them. In acknowledging both levels of narratives the thesis works from an appreciation of the notion that all social memories are relevant, and that fragmentation of social memory is to be expected in societies (Myszal, 2003). I agree with Hodgkin and Radstone that much can be gained by exploring all narratives as ‘particular versions’ instead of subscribing to the artificial/authentic dichotomy:

The very fact that there are divergences, inconsistencies, different versions at different times, is in itself revealing both about the culture in which these memories have been built and emerge, and about the workings of memory itself. The idea of memory as a tool with which to contest ‘official’ versions of the past, too, shifts from an opposition between the subordinate truth versus the dominant lie, to a concern with the ways in which particular versions of an event may be at various times and for various reasons promoted, reformulated, or silenced. This is not to deny that the dominant versions of the past are inextricably entangled with relations of power in society, but rather to refocus the question around the many ways in which conflict and contest can emerge. (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003: 5)

I suggest that we can study the process in which events are promoted, reformulated or silenced by turning our attention to mnemonic socialization: the process whereby people implicitly learn what is considered memorable and what should be forgotten (Myszal, 2003: 15). Remembering and forgetting are guided by social norms and take place in a social context: according to Myszal (2003), the nation is the main mnemonic community, but ethnic groups and families also play important parts in mnemonic socialization. For the nation, national cohesion and continuity relies on a successful socialization where a usable past and believable future are constructed. The process can be highly organized: politically and culturally oppressive states

have been known to employ ‘forced forgetting’ by rewriting national history and imposing censorship (Misztal, 2003: 17–18).

In my research I am interested in young people’s dependency on the older generation for narrations of the past, and thus social memory as something that can be intergenerationally transmitted or repressed. Among oppressed groups the family may be the greatest source of cultural and historical information (Tint, 2010b). Knowledge is vicariously absorbed by children and is transmitted across generations, even when children are removed from historical events by time, space and culture: in particular, historical events that have affected a parent’s life in a traumatic way seem to remain significant in the subsequent generation’s memory (Svob & Brown, 2012). Often it is the most highly charged emotional events that will become embedded in the social fabric of a group (Tint, 2010a). Such events can become a legacy and may be manipulated to perpetuate conflict (Tint, 2010a). In such a case it is not possible to let go of events, because the trauma is part of the group identity. It is not only memories that are passed down: values, emotions and beliefs associated with them are transmitted as well and selective omission, fabrication, exaggeration and blaming of others are very much part of this process (Tint, 2010a). For this thesis it is especially relevant to consider how intergenerational transmission of conflict memories is effected by a lack of official narrative about events.

2.2.2. SOCIETAL SILENCE

Societal silence can have many starting points (censorship, repressive erasure, humiliated silence, the fact that conditions for expression do not exist, a need to forget to move forward as a society, cultural censorship) and many ends (oblivion, social forgetting, moving forward as a society). I suggest we understand silence as a tool that takes us from a given starting point to an end. These ends must be understood as continuously temporary: there is always a possibility for silence to be broken.

The various starting points for the silence represent different intentions and levels of consciousness. When something goes unsaid, the reason could be that the memory has been repressed because it stands in contrast with the present, due to trauma or because the conditions for expression do not exist (Passerini, 2003: 238). Societal silence is often associated with totalitarian regimes (Misztal, 2003), but can also be part of democratic or transitional political regimes (Passerini, 2003). Misztal suggests that social forgetting can be motivated by society’s need to eliminate the segments of social memory that interfere with the society’s present functions (Misztal, 2010). Silence and forgetting should not necessarily be interpreted as a negative (Connerton, 2008): it may be a way to move forward in certain societies (Passerini, 2003: 247). I suggest that silence and forgetting are connected terms, but not interchangeable: forgetting is an end while silence is a tool to reach this end.

When Connerton (2008) suggests that at least seven types of forgetting exist he is also discussing different forms of silence. For this thesis the following three types discussed by Connerton (2008) are the most relevant: prescriptive forgetting (the state silencing certain information, believing this to be in the interests of all parties and can therefore acknowledge the silence publicly); forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity (discarding of memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity); and forgetting as humiliated silence (an unacknowledged, covert, widespread silence motivated by a desire to forget humiliation). While Connerton suggests that it is useful to disentangle different meanings of the term 'forgetting' (Connerton, 2008: 59), I believe much can be gained from disentangling silence from forgetting. The state's prescription of silence does not necessarily lead to forgetting; a wish to discard memories or a desire to forget does not necessarily lead to success in doing so. As Passerini notes, silence requires widespread acceptance to be successful (Passerini, 2003) – and certain groups in society may not accept the prescriptive forgetting, participate in the discarding of memories or share a state's desire to forget humiliation. In such cases, the state may resort to censorship to reach the desired end goal. This is the case in Bhutan, and thus theories of censorship are relevant to this thesis.

Cook and Heilmann's model for identifying and describing censorship regimes focuses on how censoring agents establish, justify and enforce an alignment between "permissible expressive attitudes and attitudes actually expressed by censees" (Cook & Heilmann, 2010: 4). The theoretical model suggests that people have two kinds of attitudes: those privately held and those expressed publicly. These two attitudes may relate to the 'permitted expressive attitudes' through acceptance, opposition or indifference (Cook & Heilmann, 2010: 5). Acceptance is agreement with the attitude that the censor establishes as correct. Opposition is disagreement with the censor's attitude. Indifference is a passiveness to the attitudes available. To describe a censorship regime, Cook and Heilmann suggest that we pay attention to five elements: (1) reasons for establishing a censorship: aims such as national security, public order or democratic freedom will often be found as a rationale; (2) the content of what is being censored; (3) how the censorship is enforced: power or authority will often be used; (4) the identities of censor and censee; and (5) the relationship and interaction between censor and censee. Cook and Heilmann (2010) describe public self-censorship as people's effort to resolve a conflict of attitudes between themselves and a censorship regime publicly. Private self-censorship is the suppression of one's own attitudes where a public censor is absent or irrelevant. Cook and Heilmann's understanding of public self-censorship is useful to this thesis; however, their concept of private self-censorship is less so. Private self-censorship captures the idea of self-imposed suppression of attitudes. I concur when they describe this suppression as a result of external standards such as norms, but they further suggest that part of this private self-censorship is rooted in "a personal set of values that constrain the expression of their attitudes" (Cook & Heilmann, 2010: 14). I suggest that such a distinction between motivations for self-censorship

mystifies the process, and that more can be gained from framing such personal values in relation to families, communities and societies. Cook and Heilmann argue that this form of self-censorship is not an issue of free speech, since no coercive relationship between a censor and censee is present. I would argue that all values are shared to some degree and hence if certain values constrain the expression of attitude we can speak of self-censorship – especially if, as Cook and Heilmann suggest, violation of free speech is to be understood as suppression of speech against an agent's will or interests.

Sheriff's (2000) concept of cultural censorship fills the gap I see in Cook and Heilmann's understanding of self-censorship. Sheriff identifies cultural censorship as a form of silence behaviour that is social and customary in nature, thereby distinguishing it from both self-censorship as an individual process and coercive political censorship, which are the two types discussed by Cook and Heilmann. Sheriff (2000) sees silence as socially shared and culturally codified. Groups have different interests at stake in the suppression of discourse and only a deconstruction of silence will allow an exploration of the way it shapes political cultures. With this focus on silence Sheriff wishes to challenge anthropological models of hegemony such as the distinction between ideology and hegemony put forward by the Comaroffs. I agree that the distinction between naturalized and implicit hegemony, and articulated and negotiable ideology (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), struggles to capture non-confrontational styles of responses to dominant discourses. However, I still believe the distinction between hegemony and ideology allows us to understand the power that lies in articulated confrontation. This power can be recognized without disregarding the existence and importance of silent forms of opposition. The concept of cultural censorship offers a way to discuss practices of silence and how open discussion of an issue may be avoided even in the intimate contexts of family and community, without a coercive censoring agent present (Sheriff, 2000). It is suggested that the practice of cultural censorship should be interpreted as a form of protecting oneself and others from emotional pain rather than as the acceptance of dominant narratives (Sheriff, 2000). I find this understanding more relevant to my experiences with silence than Cook and Heilmann's framing of such behaviour as rooted in personal values.

When exploring social memories and societal silence the purpose can be to present voices 'from below' that have been excluded from official narratives (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Argenti & Schramm, 2010). These voices are not, as previously discussed, to be understood as more authentic than official narrations. What is interesting about them is their existence and to explore what their status says about the present:

It is precisely because memory cannot be trusted as history that it needs to be explored, not as a record of the past, but of the present of those whose interests, views, experiences and life-worlds are somehow

inimical to or have fallen outside the historical project. (Argenti & Schramm, 2010: 3)

Social memories and societal silences are not interesting because they say something about the past and individual, but rather because they say something about the present and society.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

From the outset I knew – based on my previous experience with Bhutan¹ – that the research topics of this PhD thesis were considered sensitive in Bhutan. A choice was made to employ anthropological research techniques in order to secure valid information in the politically sensitive environment of Bhutan. Between 2013 and 2015 I conducted seven months of fieldwork in Bhutan. Most of this time was spent at Sherubtse College in Kanglung. In the following pages I will initially offer a short introduction to the inspiration and foundation of the PhD project and describe the field site and informants. Next I will reflect on my position in the field, followed by an overview of how ethnographic material was generated, the organization of the material and the research strategy. Lastly I will discuss the ethical concerns and limitations that the chosen research strategy presents.

3.1. INSPIRATION AND FOUNDATION OF THE PHD PROJECT

This PhD project was jointly funded by the Centre for Resolution of International Conflicts (CRIC) and Department of Political Science at Aalborg University. CRIC was a centre where researchers from different disciplines at the University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen Business School, Aarhus University, the University of Southern Denmark and Aalborg University cooperate. The aim of CRIC was to develop analytical tools and practical techniques for the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts. Two aspects of conflict were of particular interest to CRIC: third party intervention and the role of memory in protracted conflicts. It is the latter area of research that the current PhD project contributes to. This affiliation means that even though my approach to the fieldwork was to enter the field as free as possible from existing theoretical notions and preconceptions (Shank, 2006), I had an anchor in the aims and focuses of CRIC. This inspired me to pay extra attention to the narratives of conflict and the impact of the prolonged conflict in Bhutan. The conflict is rarely talked about in Bhutan and had it not been for my involvement with CRIC I may not have pursued the topic.

Bengtsson (2014) suggests that the position of the researcher is relevant because knowing the field – the little details and the larger patterns that make up the entire fieldwork experience – informs qualitative analysis. In line with this, I believe that my previous experiences in Bhutan are of relevance for the current project because they have undoubtedly influenced my fieldwork and analysis. My first visit to Bhutan was in 2009 when I did a four-month internship with a Bhutanese NGO. During this time I acquired much of my fundamental understanding of the society, norms and values. I lived with a Bhutanese family in Thimphu and discovered the importance of networks in Bhutan. Having an adopted family in Thimphu allowed informants to place me in the very small social network of the country. In addition to

placing me in the society this previous experience meant that I could quickly acclimatize and focus on generating ethnographic material during my fieldwork. Between my first visit to Bhutan in 2009 and the first leg of my fieldwork in 2013 I visited Bhutan four times: once as a tour guide and three times as part of a three-year Danish-Bhutanese research partnership. This partnership focused on the implementation of health policies through education institutions in Bhutan. We carried out 39 interviews for the project and while I was merely assisting in this process my interview skills – and understanding of how to interview Bhutanese informants – were developed through observation. The experiences with interview technique from this project inevitably had an impact on the quality of ethnographic material generated for the PhD project. Additionally, it was due to this partnership that I was able to gain access to Bhutan as a researcher. Getting a research visa for Bhutan is not easily achieved, especially with the aim of doing social science research, because the government is hesitant to allow such undertakings. This unofficial attitude affects both Bhutanese and foreign researchers. Bhutanese researchers also need to seek permission from the authorities for projects. Foreign researchers have experienced hostility during their fieldwork in Bhutan and negative reactions to their publications. While researchers in other countries gain access to field sites with hostile governments by opting for a tourist visa, such an approach was not a possibility due to the nature of the tourist industry of Bhutan². Hence, my affiliation with the project and the willingness of my Bhutanese colleagues from the Danish-Bhutanese research partnership to host me at Sherubtse College have been fundamental for this PhD project.

3.2. FIELD SITE AND INFORMANTS

After driving 40 km/hour for two days we finally arrive at the village of Kanglung. The trip from Thimphu to the east is 22 hours of hairpin loops, narrow roads and high-altitude mountain passes. My colleague's wife and children greet us with a lovely dinner consisting of rice, different vegetable curries and fried egg. They have made up a bed for me in the altar room. Tucked under many layers of blankets to avoid the chill of the November night, I fall asleep surrounded by butter lamps, beautiful pictures of Guru Rinpoche and the distinct smell of incense. Tomorrow I am meeting the students who will be my room-mates in the College hostel. Several people have gently suggested that I might not be 'comfortable' living in the hostels. I assured them it will be fine. But, as if I already knew what was waiting, I sleep that first night in a clean house with a wood burning stove and privacy before immersing myself in college hostel life. (Fieldwork 2013)

The initial idea of leaving the modest luxuries of Thimphu behind to do fieldwork in Kanglung came from a matter of access: all my contacts from our research project were at Sherubtse College. Through these contacts I arranged to live among the students in a hostel. I shared a 20m² dorm room with two female students³, in a three-storey-high hostel with approximately 90 female students. On each floor there were three kitchens, five shower rooms and seven toilets. My days were spent living the same rhythm as the students. Schooldays were repetitive: dressing up in *kira* (national dress⁴) for class, attending lessons, buying the few groceries available in the small village stores, cooking, eating, washing dishes in ice-cold water, cleaning the room and hand-washing our clothes. Cooking took place in the hostel kitchen where there were no refrigerator, oven or stove. Most meals consisted of rice and simple fried vegetable curries cooked in electric pans. We ate sitting on the stone floor, which was cold despite the grey thermal mats laid out across the room. During the week I joined for lessons with a specific social science class. Much of the small talk in the hostel hallways centred around which classes one was on the way to or returning from, and having a schedule helped me to position myself. Furthermore, attending the lessons gave me a chance to observe the interaction between students and teachers and how politics and democracy were discussed in this forum. The weekends were less repetitive. Sometimes we went for picnics or small walks around the beautiful area. The 1,719 students of Sherubtse College (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2014: 25) played a seemingly endless number of football matches, which we attended as players and supporters. Not much partying was taking place: Sherubtse College has strict rules for their students. No drugs, no drinking and no smoking. Girls are not allowed in the boys' hostel and vice versa. Every night we had a curfew at 8.30pm. We spent a lot of time complaining about the rules, but little time breaking them.

The choice to ask Bhutanese students about the political culture in Bhutan was made based on a number of factors. One of these was access: this was an environment where I had contacts that made it possible to set up fieldwork. A college campus in a very small village also becomes a microcosm: it is a condensed field site where I as a researcher would naturally come in contact with informants repeatedly. The remoteness of the college meant that informants did not leave Kanglung at weekends, which gave me further access to them. Additionally I considered students to be an interesting category of informants for the following reasons: (1) students historically represent a significant category of citizens when it comes to social change (the May 1968 events in France, the 1998 student-led demonstrations against President Suharto in Indonesia and the student protests of 2014 in Hong Kong provide examples of this). There is no student-led revolution on the horizon for Bhutan, but during his fieldwork in 2001 Whitecross (2002) found accounts of Bhutanese students from Sherubtse College increasingly questioning the status quo, something unheard of in Bhutan. I agree with Whitecross that education is an interesting component in the political development of Bhutan, which made the possibility of conducting fieldwork among students appealing. (2) What further

intrigued me about the possibility of interacting with Bhutanese students is that their understanding of the societal changes can play a significant role in the future of the country, because they represent the future intellectual elite. And it is the intellectual elite in the country that have access to political power⁵: to qualify for election for the National Assembly, National Council or local government a candidate needs to have a formal university degree (Election Commission of Bhutan, 2009).

The field site was also attractive because it allowed access to a new type of citizen in Bhutan: “Ramifications of the new society being created by the new Constitution reverberate particularly for the generation coming of age, and shaping as well as being shaped by circumstances quite different from those experienced by previous generations” (Walcott, 2011b: 261). My informants are part of a unique generation: they are the first to have a vote in a democratic election from the very outset of their adult lives – but they grew up in a monarchy. There is no other research focused on this generation of Bhutanese citizens; hence the choice of this field site allows the thesis to contribute with an original perspective. My informants also represent a generation that is interesting when exploring conflict and narratives. In Bhutan, knowledge of the ethnic conflict rests on intergenerational transmission for people born after the turbulent events of the early 1990s. As Tint (2010b) also found in her research: if the goal is to study memory as internalized over time, one must choose informants who have “learned the significant aspects of their cultural history through social transmission rather than direct experience” (2010b: 372). Since this generation did not witness the conflict themselves this field site allowed me to explore how narratives are passed on or information kept secret.

During my fieldwork many people were interviewed and encountered. A few became my main informants: those whom I spent the majority of time with and who helped me make sense of observations and experiences. These informants were typically interviewed three times. Other informants were interviewed only once, either in private or as part of a focus group. Unpacking the positions of my informants is not an easy task. While they collectively fall under the umbrella terms of ‘students’ and ‘informants’, they are different people with diverse life experiences that they drew from when being interviewed. Likewise, while I met all my informants during my fieldwork, under similar circumstances, my relationships with them were varied. To ensure anonymity I do not wish to single out particular informants to illustrate this point. Instead I will demonstrate the diversity of the group of informants by drawing on the emic terms ‘traditional/simple’ and ‘without manners’. ‘Traditional/simple’ is a term informants used about polite, shy and well-mannered people from smaller villages. I found that informants fitting this description were hard-working students. Their parents were often farmers and traditional/simple students had spent much of their childhood living in boarding schools because their small villages were not within walking distance of the nearest schools. They experienced Kanglung as a place of opportunity: being in college made their world bigger and getting a degree promised the opportunity to create a

different life to that of their parents. My relationships with informants of this type were to a large extent initiated and sustained by me. Naturally, ideas and knowledge flowed both ways – from me to them and from them to me – but with this type of informant the latter was predominant. The traditional/simple students taught me more about cooking, getting dressed in the national dress, cleaning and how ghosts' bites can cause back pain than the students without manners. The students without manners were often talkative and liberal. Most of them came from bigger towns and were clued into music, television and fashion trends from outside Bhutan. Many students in this category were dating people, drinking and smoking, and thus not behaving in a well-mannered way according to conservative Bhutanese values and college rules. This type of student experienced Kanglung as a place of restrictions: being in college was often their first time away from home since they had not been in boarding school, but the small town bored them. Getting a degree was expected of them and was not always something they were motivated for. In my relationship with such informants ideas and knowledge flew more readily from me to them than vice versa: they sought out my advice on relationships, sex and weight loss – making me their informant as they were mine.

3.3. MY POSITION IN THE FIELD

Pink encourage us to recognize “the constantly shifting position of the fieldworker as the research proceeds” (Pink, 2003: 188), which leads to shifting levels of understanding. While I came to the field with previously attained understandings, I knew little about the lives, perceptions and practices of Bhutanese students. As I started to explore this topic my position shifted continuously, initially in a linear movement from stranger to acquainted in my relationships with informants, but thereafter in circular movements from friend to researcher and back again; and from observer to participant and back again. And my levels of understanding similarly shifted – not necessarily in the same rhythm as my position: from recognizing patterns to being surprised by new information and back again.

My position in the field was complicated. I was always a *chillip* (foreigner, tourist or guest): being treated with hospitality and lenience by college staff, students and other Bhutanese I met during my fieldwork. I was treated as a student when questioned in class by lecturers whom I called ‘madam’ or ‘sir’, but was at the same time a researcher who interviewed the very same lecturers. I was part of the hostel eco-system: participating in the communal cleaning of the hostel on Saturdays and being asked for cigarettes when the shop was out, but at the same time I was exempt from hostel meetings, punishment and certain cleaning tasks. I resembled a child needing help getting dressed and understanding situations, but at the same time was respected as an older adult with a higher level of education than my informants. This complicated position was not problematic. However, making the transition from student/friend to researcher was something I agonized over on each visit to the field. Even though everyone was aware that I was in Bhutan to do research, it made me

uncomfortable to bring attention to this. My discomfort came from being confronted with my own marginal position and the power involved in interactions between researcher and informants, as discussed by Jensen: “power is inscribed in the historical and social positions of the actors involved irrespective of their intentions and personal characteristics” (2012: 117). Bhutan was never colonized, and hence my racial profile as white was less problematically associated with power and dominance than would be the case in many other field sites. However, it should not be disregarded as a factor that possibly impacted on interactions.

During the fieldwork I developed friendships with both students and lecturers. Due to my involvement in the aforementioned research partnership I also had an existing friendly and professional relationship with some of the lecturers. I was concerned that relationships with lecturers would make students hesitate to open up to me. I therefore downplayed these friendships in front of the students. I consider my aligning with the students successful as I built up my rapport with a large group of them.

3.4. METHODS FOR GENERATING ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

Karma and I are walking past the football field on our way back to the hostel from today's class on campus. I ask if we can do an interview. The sun is shining and it is relatively quiet here. If we try to do the interview in the hostel I know we will get sidetracked by others dropping in to say hi or distracted by food, coffee or changing out of the kira to other clothes. Karma agrees and we sit down. I pull the voice recorder out of my bag and find my notebook where I have a list of topics that I hope we can talk about. This is the third time I have interviewed Karma and she knows what to expect. While we talk she confidently picks up the voice recorder to hold it closer to her mouth – she wants to make sure that my recording is good. (Fieldwork 2015)

I entered the field with an open approach as is traditional in anthropological research: no research questions were set in stone but I knew I wanted to explore my informants experience with democracy, practices around political sensitivity and knowledge about the conflict of the 1990s. I had identified the following topics as interesting for these broad initial ideas: authorities, societal critique, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and traditions. However, I was open to the idea that the fieldwork itself would inform the formulation of specific research questions. Thus my research design left me open to the unexpected and understanding topics from the various perspectives of informants. Silence as a theme

for the thesis was thus only chosen during the writing-up phase where I realized how much of my fieldwork had revolved around this. Sheriff (2000) notes how studying silence presents certain methodological challenges. It can be difficult to ask informants about silence, because this involves breaking it. When I broke silence about the sensitive topics I was asking informants about, I was initially asking the informants about democracy and political sensitivity, not silence (as Appendix B demonstrates). The informants talked about silence when answering questions on these topics and hence the fieldwork identified this as a focus for me. Studying something as intangible as silence came naturally because the informants themselves put into words how this was an integral part of Bhutanese society and the political culture. I gradually started paying more attention to silence and ways of breaking it. With this shift in focus, interviews I had previously thought of as unsuccessful – because an informant had little to say about the topics I had emphasized – suddenly became interesting. The awkwardness became important and telling. Thus, I did not need to change research methods in order to gain access to what was not said – I just needed to look at my existing material through this lens.

Because the focus on silence was not determined beforehand, I allowed knowledge production to take different directions and the research proceeded on multiple fronts during the fieldwork (Mattley, 2006). I prepared interview guides before arriving in Bhutan for all three visits to the field (see appendices). During my fieldwork I would be inspired to ask different questions and would incorporate them into the original guides. I would check my understandings by presenting informants with statements from other interviews and invite them to help me make sense of it (see Appendix C).

To explore the topics identified as interesting for my research I employed a range of qualitative research techniques. My ethnographic material consists of: individual interviews; focus group interviews; participant observations from 63 lessons I attended at college; newspaper articles; exam answers from class tests about politics; and my field diary where conversations, events and observations were noted down throughout my stay in the field. The lessons, newspaper articles and exam answers were available to me in English since this is a widely used language in Bhutan. I could even read the notes passed among students during lessons and the graffiti on the tables since most was written in English. At all levels of education subjects are taught in English while Dzongkha is taught as a second language. English is used for education, in official government correspondence⁶ and in media outlets⁷ because 19 languages are spoken in Bhutan and only an estimated 160,000 Bhutanese speak Dzongkha (Simoni & Whitecross, 2007: 176). Hence, the preferred languages of my informants differed but all spoke English to a very high standard. Interviews were conducted in English to avoid the use of translators. I believe the nuances possibly lost by conducting interviews in English are preferable to the disadvantages of using a translator for discussions on politically sensitive issues.

I wrote my field diary in Danish as a way of keeping my thoughts and observations safe in a living situation where I had close to no privacy since I was sharing a room with two students. I made notes about the events that took place and when I had relevant conversations with informants these were noted down in the field diary as soon as possible. Interviews were captured on a voice recorder. The interview technique was inspired by the works of Spradly (1979) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Autobiographical interviews were conducted with key informants to help shed light on behaviour and attitudes (Crewe & Maruna, 2006) (see Appendix A). Before each interview, I would point out the potential harmful effects of talking to me about certain issues (Bold, 2012) and ask them to skip a question if they did not want to answer. While some informants skipped questions others would undoubtedly provide me with socially acceptable answers. My anthropological approach to the fieldwork was designed to enable the former and avoid the latter. In interviews with key informants I believe that our familiarity with each other aided the interviews in a positive way. After the interview we would often spend time together. Regularly the informant would say something relevant to the interview during this time and I would note it down in my field diary as soon as possible. For focus group interviews I followed Dawson et al.'s manual (1993). I did many of the focus group interviews in a storage room in the back of the college library. Before starting the interview I would give an introduction telling the participants about my research and reasons for recording the discussion. I would note down who was talking and try to capture non-verbal reactions.

3.5. CATEGORIZATION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

In categorizing the material generated during fieldwork I differentiated between three types of informants: key informants, student informants and other informants. I define a key informant as a student whom I have a very good rapport with and have interviewed three times or more. Ten informants fall into this category: they are all female, social science or media students born between the years 1992 and 1995. Twenty-two individual interviews and six focus group interviews were conducted with key informants. The category of student informants includes the students I either only interviewed once or had little rapport with. Fifty-one informants fall into this category: 21 male students and 30 female students. Most of them are media or social science students born between the years 1992 and 1996. Six individual interviews and 15 focus group interviews were conducted with student informants. Eleven individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted with other informants. Other informants include employees of Sherubtse College (I interviewed eight employees and had a good rapport with four of these) and six family members of key informants. I have informants from 16 out of the 20 districts in the country⁸. The possibility of such diversity is an additional reason why Sherubtse College was considered an interesting field site: people from all districts

of the country come to Kanglung to study. Hence, doing fieldwork in the college gave me access to a geographically diverse group of informants.

Two types of under-representation can be found in the empirical material for this PhD thesis. Firstly, all key informants are female. During my fieldwork I did form friendships with male students and lecturers; however, due to the gender-segregated living situations and cultural conservatism these connections were not as close as those formed with female students. I did actively seek out male informants and found that their access to sensitive knowledge did not seem to differ from that of the female students, and their perception of the political culture did not show any significant difference either. When it comes to practices in the sensitive political culture, male students seemed to exercise much the same caution as my female informants. Consequently I do not consider this to be a study of female perception and practices. Secondly, there is an under-representation of Lhotshampa students among my informants⁹. As with the male informants I actively sought out informants from this ethnic group and conducted four of my focus group interviews exclusively with Lhotshampa students. While narratives about conflict differed among the ethnic groups, perceptions of and practices in the sensitive political environment showed much commonality. Hence, I do not consider this to be a study of the way a certain ethnic group in Bhutan navigates the political culture.

All ethnographic material was categorized using the software NVivo. I carried out open coding of the material, categorizing it into themes without trying to make it fit into a preconceived theoretical framework (Bold, 2012: 130). The aim of my analysis of the ethnographic material has been to construct a whole account that brings together several smaller pieces of material into a meta-narrative (Bold, 2012: 29). I have aimed to produce experience-near writing that does not shy away from emotions, ambiguity and disorder (Amit, 2010). As part of this I consider avoidance and lack of knowledge interesting (Dodge & Geis, 2006), although this is difficult to account for when organizing material in NVivo.

Experience rather than theory has been the starting point for my writing (Bold, 2012: 37). My main aim has been to give voice to my informants' experiences rather than describe 'what happened' (Bold, 2012: 30). Hence, the several interviews conducted with a single informant are not compared to disclose inconsistencies. Rather, the analysis rests upon the narrative analysis tradition of respecting the fact that multiple 'truths' are experienced (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012). During the analysis I also bear in mind that my interviews and field notes should not be "objectified as knowledge" (Bengtsson, 2014: 741); my ethnographic material does not represent 'truth' but is a product co-created by my informants and me. I do not wish to problematize this but rather consider drawing on myself as a resource when doing research as part of experience-near anthropology (Collins & Gallinat, 2010). Answering the overall question of this thesis has not been a matter of going through the ethnographic material looking for answers, but a more organic result of letting

the material be the starting point for the four articles and condensing discussion of this – aided by theory – into more generalized insights, as will be demonstrated in the discussion chapter of the thesis.

3.6. ETHICAL CONCERNS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

I arrive at the library ten minutes before the focus group interview is supposed to start. The plastic chairs are scattered around the messy room and I quickly set them up around the table. My informants arrive and while we wait for the lady who runs the cafeteria to bring us tea and cake I tell them about my research. There are especially two things I stress: I am in no way affiliated with the Bhutanese government and I will keep the recording of the interview confidential. I tell them that I believe certain Bhutanese authorities would not approve of my line of questioning and warn them that people can read things into published research that the researcher never intended. The tea and cake arrive; we spend an hour talking about democracy, ethnic conflict and Bhutanese authorities. I thank the informants for their time and go to pay the bill in the cafeteria. Later that day I transfer the recording to my computer. I upload the interview online and also save it to the memory card of my camera. Then I delete the interview from both my computer and the voice recorder. (Fieldwork 2014)

When conducting anthropological fieldwork there are many ethical questions to consider. In this chapter I want to address the following: (1) risk of harm; (2) participant selection; (3) power differences; and (4) underlying assumptions. After reflecting on these four ethical concerns the limitations of the research will be touched upon.

(1) As researchers we need to assess how our research may put our informants at risk of harm. I knew the topics I intended to study were considered politically sensitive in Bhutan and I feared that all Bhutanese citizens involved with me – as informants or having helped me in any way – could potentially be harmed by the research. The fear was intangible: I did not have a clear idea about what could happen, but just thought that ‘something’ could happen: that ‘someone’ might punish me and others. As I got to know my field site and my informants it was interesting to note how my concerns mirrored local concerns. The informants could not name anyone who had actually been punished for speaking freely, but strongly believed it could happen in some way or form. It is important to point out that

physical harm was never a concern either for me or for my informants. I considered the worst-case scenario to be a stern request to leave Bhutan and never being able to get a visa again. My informants considered being expelled from college or losing out on future government jobs to be possible punishments. I worried that those who had allowed me to visit the college could lose their jobs or be denied promotions. I addressed these different concerns with diverse strategies. First of all, as suggested in the vignette above, I uploaded and then deleted interviews at the first opportunity after conducting them. Interviews were never kept on the voice recorder for more than a few hours, as I considered it too easy for others to get access to the device. Neither did I keep the recordings on my computer – even though it required a password to access – because I imagined it a possibility that authorities would confiscate the computer if I was asked to leave the country. In both my field diary and articles I used pseudonyms for informants and did my best to write about them as individuals without singling them out in ways that made them recognizable. My sample size of 75 gives an acceptable level of anonymity, although no effort was made to conceal whom I was interviewing while in the field. I also aimed to address local concerns by postponing publications of research until after my informants had graduated from college. The fear of being expelled has been addressed since informants had moved on from college life with their degrees attained by the time articles were being published. However, many of those who helped me gain access to Bhutan were already in jobs and may not have moved on in life in quite the same way as my student informants. Before leaving Bhutan I had private talks with these gatekeepers about my preliminary findings. I gave them the opportunity to see how I planned on writing about politically sensitive issues and asked advice on how to proceed. All gatekeepers treated my findings with interest and seemingly found my ambition to address these sensitive issues commendable. They offered important advice and reassured me that I was not putting them at any risk of harm.

(2) Participant selection raises several ethical concerns. During the fieldwork I relied on my key informants to help suggest other people who would be willing to be interviewed. One key informant – Karma, as mentioned in one of the vignettes – was particularly helpful when setting up focus group interviews at the beginning of my fieldwork. I am aware that this use of networking can lead the research to focus on a small group with shared interests. To avoid this I slowly moved away from relying on Karma as my own network grew during the fieldwork. As discussed earlier, I actively sought out Lhotshampa students for my research. I was open and honest to these students about why I was asking to interview them and also explained why I chose to organize a few of the focus group interviews around ethnic affiliation. As illustrated in the articles, this paid off because it allowed certain informants to feel safe and open up about their struggles as part of the Lhotshampa minority in Bhutan. Most focus groups were with mixed groups of students, so they were given room to disclose disagreements among themselves. Informants did not seem offended by being asked to participate in my research based on their ethnicity (but this could be part of the lenience given to me as a *chillip*). I am aware that we as researchers need

to be sensitive to the realities of specific lives and not exemplify participants. However, to protect the anonymity of my participants I have found myself forced to exclude much of the specific information about them in my writing. While this is not ideal, priority must be given to the safety of the informants.

(3) Power differences between the researcher and the informants show up in both fieldwork and the writing-up phase. I was very conscious of this when I chose how I presented myself as a researcher in the field. By living in the dorm room – despite being offered more comfortable alternatives – I was emphasizing that I myself was a student, thereby aligning myself with my informants. I also worked with the power difference by encouraging them to see themselves as my teachers when it came to the Bhutanese language, clothes and cooking. Dressing in the national dress was an opportunity for this. Putting on the national dress is complicated and thus provided me with an opportunity to ask my informants for help every day. Some would come to my room in the morning before class and ask if I needed help and I would always agree to this generous offer. Those who were the same size as me would lend me dresses and jackets since my own collection was limited. Sometimes I also needed help to adjust the dress during the day. I believe these daily moments of reliance on my informants helped avoid the power differences between us becoming alienating during the fieldwork. When writing up their findings, researchers have a lot of power. The experiences of my informants are told in limited ways to create coherence in arguments and to stay on topic. However, I have aimed to give voice to the people I was working with by letting the fieldwork inform my writing instead of having preconceived research questions that were set in stone before meeting my informants. Another way I try to give voice and power to my informants is by quoting them in articles. The work should, however, be understood as my interpretation of events and experiences: I take full responsibility for the conclusions drawn.

(4) There are two types of underlying assumptions that I want to reflect on: my own and my informants'. When constructing interview guides I tried to avoid leading questions, but also knew that a certain amount of guiding would be needed because some of the interviews involved breaking silences on sensitive issues. Passerini points out that silences are observable when they are broken or interrupted, and hence our task as researchers can be to break silences in order to explore relationships between silence, speech, oblivion and memory (Passerini, 2003: 237–240). To establish the interview as a safe space to address sensitive political issues I found that it was important that some of my assumptions were revealed to informants – not for them to agree with, but as a way of showing the same openness and vulnerability that I was hoping they would show me. Thus, sharing my assumption had a methodological goal: by positioning myself I created room for my informants to likewise position themselves beyond officially acceptable answers. This proved especially important when conducting interviews with Lhotshampa informants. They reacted positively to me demonstrating that I knew about the

conflict and was sympathetic towards the struggles their families had endured and were still facing. In cases where informants knew very little about the topics I was asking about, this strategy meant that my assumptions played a large role simply because I needed to clarify what I was asking them about. I also found that my underlying assumptions about topics would sometimes guide the focus group interviews more than they ideally should. This happened because informants were either unfamiliar or uncertain about the concept of free discussion that a group interview entails. I always introduced the ideas behind focus group interviews and encouraged the participants to jump in whenever they had something to say, and not wait for me to ask them directly. I also tried silent probing and other techniques for creating opportunities for the informants to take the lead. However, I found that conversations quickly died out if I did not actively encourage people to talk. I believe this to be a result of my informants growing up with a school system that did not encourage debate and participation to a large degree.

I believe that my informants had few underlying assumptions about my work. Very few of them showed a direct interest in my research or what I was going to do with the interviews they participated in. Sometimes the lack of assumptions took interviews off track or made it difficult to discuss things. There is an important ethnical concern to this lack of assumptions: I, unwittingly, informed some of my informants about conflicts and societal problems that they had no previous concept of. In interviews where I realized that an informant had never heard of the conflict of the 1990s I took great care to share only well-balanced information and did my best to avoid sharing my own assumptions about the issue. In such cases I took careful note of their responses to the information and kept it short unless asked to go into more detail. I would let such informants know that I had more information that I would be happy to share with them – but would let them actively seek out this information rather than forcing it on them.

The research design has resulted in two limitations that I want to address now: short periods of fieldwork and students as informants. My seven months of fieldwork were conducted in three visits: 1 November to 18 December 2013, 12 January to 20 March 2014, and 7 March to 28 May 2015. The break between the 2013 visit and the 2014 visit was because students were home for the long winter break in this period and hence not on campus in Kanglung. The longer break between the 2014 and 2015 visits was because of my personal circumstances. Thus, there was no larger design behind breaking up the fieldwork in this way – it was simply life that got in the way of a longer and uninterrupted stay among my informants. While I quickly built up relationships and believe that I returned home with sufficient and reliable ethnographic material, a longer and uninterrupted fieldwork might have resulted in different understandings. Much of my writing is based on interviews, and a longer fieldwork would have provided me with more time for participant observation so that analysis could rely more on the insights provided by this. A longer stay might have also created deeper relationships with certain informants. However, it is also

possible that returning to the field had a positive effect on my relationships. It allowed informants to experience my sustained interest in them and their lives, not just by me returning to the field but also in online contact between the visits. Returning to the field twice furthermore made it possible for me to bring gifts for key informants and thus confirm the ties between us. The second limitation of my research I want to address concerns my informants. It is a small sample of the Bhutanese society: they are all around the same age and in the privileged position of having qualified for free higher education. While they come from different backgrounds and from almost all districts of the country, it results in the provision of a limited perspective to the reader. This is, however, a premise of anthropological research. All I can do is acknowledge that I do not know how free speech is experienced and practised among young people who are working as farmers after finishing their mandatory school years. I do not know how much the strategy of silent diplomacy is debated among powerful officials. I do not know how *Driglam Namzha* is experienced by illiterate people. I do not know what older Bhutanese citizens remember about the ethnic conflict of the 1990s. What I do know – to a certain degree – is what Bhutanese college students knew, felt and thought about these issues while I was conducting my fieldwork.

Endnotes for Chapter 3

¹ I did an internship with a Bhutanese NGO from 14 August to 12 December 2009. I participated in visits to Bhutan as part of a Danish-Bhutanese research partnership on three occasions: 8–20 March 2012, 17–30 November 2012 and 8–27 October 2013. I was a tour guide in Bhutan between 4 and 17 November 2012.

² In Bhutan all tourists (excluding Indian, Bangladeshi and Maldivian passport holders) must book their holiday and attain their visa through a Bhutanese tour operator or their international partner. Bhutan has a ‘high value, low impact’ policy for tourists and requires tour operators to provide accommodation, transport, guides and meals. The operators are not allowed to charge less than a daily rate of \$200 in the low season and \$250 in the high season for each tourist (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2018).

³ During the fieldwork I had two different sets of room-mates: I lived with two students during fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, and another two students during fieldwork in 2015.

⁴ The *kira* is the national dress for Bhutanese women. It is a floor-length rectangular piece of woven fabric wrapped around the body and held either from the shoulders by brooch-like hooks (*koma*) or from the waist by a belt (*kerā*). Women wear the *kira* over a blouse, with a short jacket. The men’s national dress is called a *gho*, and is a knee-length robe fastened by a belt. All Bhutanese citizens are required to observe the national dress code in government offices, schools and at formal occasions.

⁵ Walcott (2011b) speaks of “the country’s future leaders” (2011b: 262) when referring to the students of Sherubtse College.

⁶ A survey of 43 government offices showed that only 10 per cent of these offices used Dzongkha in official correspondence. The rest were conducted in English (Wangchuk, 2018).

⁷ It must be taken into consideration that the English and Dzongkha versions of, for example, the newspaper Kuensel can differ in content, as pointed out by Whitecross (2002: 101)

⁸ The four districts from which I do not have any informants are: Zhemgang (population 21,470), Bumthang (population 18,965), Trongsa (population 15,936) and Gasa (population 3,664) (National Statistics Bureau, 2015). The three districts I have most informants from are: Paro (population 42,830), Punakha (population 21,037) and Thimphu (population 123,255) (National Statistics Bureau, 2015).

⁹ It is difficult to estimate how large this under-representation is. There is no reliable statistical information about how large a part of the population of Bhutan is made up of Lhotshampa, and no information about how many students at Sherubtse College identify as Lhotshampa.

CHAPTER 4. THE FOUR ARTICLES

Due to copyright issues only the abstracts of the four articles are included in this chapter. Two of the articles are published in peer-reviewed journals and can be found in their full length using the details included here. The two other articles have been submitted to academic journals but have not yet been published. Once published, it will be possible to find them through their titles, keywords or my full name in search engines dedicated to scholarly publication. Members of the PhD assessment committee have been provided with all four articles in their full length, found as extra appendices in the assessment committee's version of the thesis.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND SILENT YOUTH PROTEST IN BHUTAN – 'PLZ DELETE IT FROM YOUR INBOX'

ABSTRACT: This article suggests that a political censorship regime exists in Bhutan and that appeals to ensure security and sovereignty of the country, rather than power, are used to uphold this regime. Fieldwork uncovers that fear of how authorities may punish anyone in open opposition is widespread among Bhutanese college students. A number of political issues are characterised as 'sensitive' by informants and skilful navigation around them is needed. The perception of free speech as limited inspires self-censorship in public and in private among Bhutanese college students. Free speech is practised in culturally specific ways and online, where anonymous opposition against the established correct 'non-discourse' is known as 'silent protests'.

KEYWORDS: Bhutan, democracy, freedom of speech, press, self-censorship, Youth

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SILENT DIPLOMACY AND REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION: WHAT THE DOKLAM CONFLICT REVEALED ABOUT GOVERNMENT, MEDIA AND CITIZENS IN BHUTAN

ABSTRACT: From 16 June to 28 August 2017, a tense standoff between India and China unfolded in the Doklam region of Bhutan. While media around the world reported on this, Bhutan's media and government were notably silent. This article explores this silence by focusing on three actors: government, media and citizens of Bhutan. The government's approach can be characterized as silent diplomacy, where almost nothing was communicated about the conflict. The Bhutanese media accepted this approach and followed suit. However, some citizens of Bhutan opposed the silence by discussing the conflict online. The Doklam conflict highlights how politically sensitive issues are dealt with in Bhutan. It is argued that the government's approach to sharing information is undemocratic and its power over the media too strong. The Bhutanese citizens' reactions to the silence on the Doklam issue is a testament to the fact that political censorship in Bhutan is increasingly being questioned.

KEYWORDS: Bhutan, Doklam, media, silence, censorship

DRIGLAM NAMZHA AND SILENCED ETHNICITY IN BHUTAN'S MONARCHICAL DEMOCRACY

ABSTRACT: Bhutan's democratic development has not involved a break with religion and monarchy. Thus, the regime is best understood as a monarchical democracy in which democratic freedoms, religious etiquette and monarchical reverence live side by side. The complicated relationship between freedom, mandatory etiquette, democracy and hierarchy in Bhutan inspires this article to ask: what can lived experiences of traditional etiquette (*Driglam Namzha*) demonstrate about the nature of Bhutan's monarchical democracy? To answer this question the article presents interview data and vignettes from anthropological fieldwork at a Bhutanese college. It is concluded that the emphasis on *Driglam Namzha* in this monarchical democracy shows both that social cohesion is accepted as an important element in Bhutanese society and that a strong emphasis on uniformity silences ethnicity. *Driglam Namzha*, furthermore, cultivates and maintains pre-democratic hierarchical divisions which informants opposed. The article advances our understanding of Bhutan's democracy through a discussion of *Driglam Namzha*'s current place in society.

KEYWORDS: Bhutan, *Driglam Namzha*, social cohesion, hierarchies

PIECING TOGETHER PAST AND PRESENT IN BHUTAN: NARRATION, SILENCE AND FORGETTING IN CONFLICT

ABSTRACT: What happens when conflict is silenced in official narratives but not forgotten among a population? This article explores this question using interview data from anthropological fieldwork in Bhutan. In Bhutan, the ethnic conflict of the early 1990s is surrounded by silence and is not openly discussed. Despite this silence, young Bhutanese have formed a multiplicity of narratives about the conflict. The article highlights three different narratives of conflict, as well as the oblivion found among informants. The main argument is that the silence surrounding the conflict in Bhutan has contributed to two forms of societal rift: between the authorities and the people, and between people themselves. The article contributes to the discussion about what role social memories play in conflicts, by suggesting that silence may cause wariness and hinder processes that help societies to move past conflict in a constructive way.

KEYWORDS: conflict, narratives, silence, forgetting, Bhutan

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International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 2018, Vol.12, pp.1-11

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The four articles that comprise the main body of this thesis were written over several years; they draw on different parts of the empirical material and have been influenced by different editors and reviewers. While revolving around similar themes and all discussing Bhutan, they take the reader in different directions. In this part of the thesis the four articles will be tied together in a discussion of cross-article findings while providing a coherent, but multifaceted, answer to the overall question of the thesis: what forms of societal silence exist in Bhutan and what consequences do they have for the political culture of the country? The discussions will also relate findings back to literature reviewed in Chapter 2 in order to establish what contributions the thesis makes.

First, two forms of societal silence that have been identified in the articles will be discussed and it will be established how the thesis contributes to the field of research focused on Bhutan. Next, two consequences that societal silence has for the political culture of the country will be discussed. To conclude, it will be demonstrated how the thesis advances our understanding of societal silence.

5.1. TWO FORMS OF SOCIETAL SILENCE IN BHUTAN

Bhutan is a hybrid regime and we may specify this to mean a monarchical democracy that has not made the break with religion and monarchy, which characterizes the democratic transitions in European history (Masaki, 2013). Old values and patterns of reaction are still very much part of the political landscape in Bhutan. This creates certain societal silences in Bhutan's new democracy and the articles have identified several forms. What I have chosen to emphasize in the current discussion is that both authorities and Bhutanese citizens take part in the construction and maintenance of these silences. Thus, it will be discussed how the four articles contribute with understandings of two forms: silent diplomacy employed by the authorities and accepted sensitivity by citizens.

Silent Diplomacy

Silent diplomacy is a practice by authorities that establishes silence as the correct attitude to sensitive issues simply by not debating them in public or with the public. It is not a complete denial of the existence of certain issues, but rather a pattern of reaction where a limited amount of information and communication makes up the Bhutanese authorities' response. The actions of authorities and media during the Doklam conflict illustrated how it is communicated to the citizens of Bhutan that the

correct way to respond to sensitive issues is with silence (as suggested in the article 'Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan'). The silent diplomacy around situations like the Doklam conflict sends the strong message to citizens of Bhutan that certain issues are not open for democratic debate. Thus silent diplomacy is a method of enforcing censorship in Bhutanese society. The censorship regime is not enforced by power, but rather by reference to the security of the country (as touched upon in 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox)'). It is a censorship encouraged by the strong message silence can send when coming from authorities that are understood by many citizens to be willing to use extraordinary measures to punish those in opposition (as discussed in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict').

The censorship regime in Bhutan is closely connected to, if not mainly driven by, the cultural vulnerability experienced as new societal conditions are established (as discussed in 'Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan's Monarchical Democracy'). This was seen in its most dramatic expression during the 1990s conflict where the nation-building project of Bhutan led the Lhotshampa population into open conflict with the elite. Understanding this conflict is central to debates about the present political culture and censorship in Bhutan. While the articles in this thesis suggest that the Bhutanese censorship regime is mainly preoccupied with fostering social cohesion, there is also censorship that goes beyond this. Censorship in the form of silent diplomacy has become a default pattern of reaction in the political culture of Bhutan (as illustrated in 'Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan'). This is a pattern of reaction ingrained in the Bhutanese political culture, which is important to identify because it hinders democratic debate and the resolution of conflicts, and creates a political culture where rifts between population and authorities are created (as discussed in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). Silence furthermore creates the democratic challenge of wariness in the public around issues understood as sensitive.

Accepted Sensitivity

Unpacking the emic term 'sensitivity' is one of the contributions of this thesis to our understanding of the political culture in Bhutan. Issues of sensitivity came up continuously during my fieldwork. It became clear that sensitivity influences my informants' exercising of freedom of speech (as explored in the article 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox)'). Informants would suggest that a number of issues were sensitive and advise me that discussion of these could be punished by authorities. The classification of an issue as sensitive should thus be seen as closely associated with authorities. That an issue was sensitive did not mean that informants were oblivious to it, or refused to talk to

me about it (as seen in ‘Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict’). Rather, informants demonstrated how practices of navigation in the public sphere – such as ‘being critical in the right way’ – allowed them to gather information about issues and form opinions. Sharing information and opinions on sensitive issues was perceived as something that could only be done in very limited ways. In private conversations and in silent protests online some informants would debate sensitive issues. However, in public informants would hesitate to touch upon them, inspired by the larger societal silence. Thus accepted sensitivity should be understood as a form of collaborative silence that informants experience as required by authorities through silent diplomacy (as explored in the article ‘Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan’). While the notion that authorities will punish people for breaking silence on sensitive issues might be imagined, the consequences of the silence for the citizens are very real. Oblivion and diverse understandings of the present are direct results of Bhutanese citizens accepting silence and sensitivity in their society. Both have political consequences. Oblivion hinders full participation in democracy when it leaves some informants unaware of issues that are important – not just for the past, but for the present society. Diverse understandings, when situated in a silence that does not provide the opportunity to reflect on the differences, become problematic as they hinder the development of tolerance and mutual understanding. However, my work has shown that Bhutanese citizens may increasingly not accept sensitivity as a non-negotiable part of Bhutanese political culture.

5.1.1. UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL CULTURE

The section above establishes how the four articles advance our understanding of censorship and sensitivity in Bhutan. To further establish how the thesis contributes to the field of research focused on Bhutan this section will relate research findings back to selected parts of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Bhutan’s transition to democracy

Bhutan remains a limited democracy, as the thesis has illustrated. Both Masaki (2013) and Bothe (2011) suggest in different ways that the introduction of democracy has come with institutional reforms, but little shift in power structures. Among other things, this means that while civil rights are ensured by the Constitution, informants were found to hesitate to make use of these rights. We see an example of this when silence on sensitive issues is accepted and indifference towards such issues is practised by informants. However, in interviews some informants would express frustration with the lack of shifts in power structures, and state that they wanted more openness, freedom and dialogue in Bhutanese democracy. The thesis has contributed with the suggestion that the transition to democracy has opened up the possibility of imagining a different power structure and a democracy more fully transitioned from former regimes.

The monarchical democracy of Bhutan

Bhutan's hybrid version of democracy draws on hierarchies and legitimacy connected to the former theocracy and monarchy. We see this when *Driglam Namzha* is emphasized and integrated in the democratic project. Many informants were willing participants in the etiquette (as Whitecross [2017] also found) and I have demonstrated how some even used it to claim membership of Bhutanese society. With these insights the thesis contributes with the suggestion that not all citizens are passive subjects who are oppressed by a monarchical form of hybrid regime. Informants showed an awareness of how parts of *Driglam Namzha* clash with democratic values; they opposed the hierarchies but accepted the emphasis on uniformity in the monarchical democracy. The idea that social cohesion depends on uniformity makes ethnicity a sensitive issue in Bhutan. Schmidt (2017a) and Miyamoto (2017) both discuss how ethnicity is considered a sensitive issue in Bhutanese politics because of the connection between uniformity and unity. The thesis contributes to this discussion by arguing that the emphasis on *Driglam Namzha* demonstrates a fundamental unease with diversity and equality in the monarchical democracy of Bhutan.

The political culture of Bhutan

The four articles have collectively painted a picture of the political culture in Bhutan. The political system maintains its continuity (Pye, 1972: 290) with a political culture marked by limited freedom of speech and societal silence about sensitive issues. In agreement with Muni (2014), the thesis suggests that the Bhutanese media struggles with fragility, a lack of access and limited freedom. Schmidt (2017a) suggests that there is a lack of opposition in the political culture of Bhutan and my work has contributed with nuances as to why informants and media hesitate to oppose authorities. Miyamoto (2017) argues that the political culture is characterized by uncertainty, cautiousness, suspicion and fear (2017: 105). The articles have illustrated how informants "perform appropriate political roles" (Pye, 1972: 290) by cautiously navigate the uncertain political culture despite suspicion and fear. The thesis has also noted an emerging expression of discontent with the current political culture, the role of media, control, hierarchical structures and societal silence. While I would still avoid the terms 'critical' or 'frank' in regard to public debate in Bhutan, the thesis has illustrated how small acts of opposition occur and that informants do question certain features of the current political culture.

The conflict of the 1990s

Bothe suggests that the events of the 1990s "belong to the past" (2011: 8) but this thesis suggests that the influence of the events is very much a part of the present political culture. To avoid discontent certain issues are avoided by authorities, but paradoxically this strong grip on content for public discussion creates the discontent that is feared. Part of the discontent is connected to the notion that silence lets part of the population move on from conflict, while others experience continued consequences and the additional burden of a lack of acknowledgment and

knowledge. Evans notes that there are two sides to the story of what happened in the 1990s: the state's oppression in the creation of Bhutanese national identity and the violent resistance of the Lhotshampa to it. Evans suggests that in Bhutan the latter version is told and accepted, while the narratives found in the camps focus on government oppression (2010a: 40). This thesis advances our understanding of this parallel narrative situation in two ways. First, it would be more accurate to say that in Bhutan no side of the story is told officially, rather than a specific side. The story is told to such a limited degree that some young Bhutanese are oblivious to the conflict. Secondly, the narrative that focuses on oppression is present among my informants and thus is accepted – by some citizens in Bhutan – as a narrative of the past. These contributions to our understanding of the Bhutanese political culture and conflict of the 1990s are perhaps some of the most unique insights the fieldwork has allowed me to gain.

As a whole this thesis has focused on the current political culture in Bhutan and the perceptions held by those residing in the country. This sets the research apart from scholars such as Hutt, Giri and Evans who provide us with an understanding of Bhutan's history and the experiences of Bhutanese refugees. The articles have focused on how informants understand and navigate the political culture, thereby contributing with a different perspective on the politics of Bhutan to the ones found in the works of Muni, Masaki, Miyamoto and Schmidt, who focus on the larger structures of society. The strong focus on informants' experiences in daily life has allowed me to illustrate the empowerment and resistance of informants as they navigate the systems of power and law that the respective works of Bothe and Whitecross introduce us to.

5.2. TWO CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIETAL SILENCE

The four articles have discussed several consequences of the societal silence in Bhutan. In this part of the discussion I have chosen to highlight two that I find most significant for our understanding of the Bhutanese political culture: the lack of access to knowledge that the societal silence creates and the diverse social memories that exist unchallenged in Bhutanese society. It will now be discussed how the four articles contribute with understandings of these consequences of silence.

Access to Knowledge

A defining feature of Bhutanese society is the lack of access to knowledge. Old codes of secrecy flourish in Bhutan. This lack of access to knowledge deepens an already existing rift between population and authorities (as discussed in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). While these codes of secrecy influence everyone, they may be especially noticeable when visiting the country as a researcher. There is much bureaucracy involved in gaining research permits, and finding informants willing to share

thoughts, knowledge and experiences can be challenging. Wariness about participation was something we experienced during my participation in the aforementioned three-year Danish-Bhutanese research partnership. For interviews with teachers and principals about health promotion in schools, we needed to provide research permits, and even then, many interviews would be clearly marked by informants uncertainty about what information we were allowed to be given. I bring this experience up now because it allows me to make two points about access to information and knowledge in Bhutan. First, there is a lack of openness in Bhutan (as discussed in ‘Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan’). This is a democratic problem created by systems and those in power, but also a culture that expands beyond the authorities. The censorship regime creates a form of paranoia among informants encountered (as discussed and referenced in the title of the article ‘Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: ‘Plz Delete it from Your Inbox’’). However – and this is the second point my previous research experience in Bhutan allows me to make – it was possible to somewhat avoid this paranoia through the choice of method. Anthropological fieldwork allowed informants to trust me with knowledge that I should, perhaps, not have been given access to. Informants would sometimes address this while being interviewed, an acknowledgment that did not seem to stop them talking freely. While access to knowledge is not a given in Bhutan, the combination of building a rapport and me breaking silence on sensitive issues allowed many informants to open up and share their thoughts about a range of issues. While this thesis is focused on contributing to the body of social science research focused on Bhutan and the body of research focused on silence, in doing so it contributes to our understanding of how issues of silence can be researched. Specifically, it is suggested that anthropological fieldwork is a useful method of generating empirical material on this subject matter, which is only observable when interrupted. The rapport built between researcher and informants can create a space for silence to be broken and make it possible to say things that should not be said and answer questions that should not be asked. The thesis contributes with this methodological observation about access to knowledge.

One issue informants shared their knowledge about was the conflict of the 1990s. One of the unique contributions of the thesis is the insight that most of the students actually know about the conflict, which was something I was not completely sure about going into the field. It was equally interesting to discover that some were oblivious to the conflict or indifferent towards it (as illustrated in ‘Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict’). While some students demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the conflict (as touched upon in ‘Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan’s Monarchical Democracy’), others had a very limited understanding of sensitive issues from Bhutan’s past. I suggest that this lack of knowledge is not just theirs; it is an expression of intentions of those around them. In my informants, we see to a certain extent older generations, the media, the education system and the political culture of

Bhutan mirrored back to us. The intergenerational transmission of knowledge about sensitive issues like the conflict is extremely varied in Bhutan. However, the empirical evidence illustrates that some events are not possible to construct out of existence with silence. Among my Bhutanese informants, narratives about the conflict resurface, without being anchored in official narratives to give them meaning and room for reflection (as argued in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). Unpacking this feature of Bhutanese knowledge sharing is one of the ways in which the thesis advances our understanding of what consequences silence has in society.

Diverse Social Memories

There will always be diverse social memories coexisting in societies; what makes the diversity in Bhutan remarkable is that silence is simultaneously letting some of the informants live in a peaceful society while others are experiencing continued conflict (as illustrated in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). This allows me to suggest that people may not only disagree about what is in a conflict but also – more fundamentally – about if there is a conflict. Different social memories of conflict exist side by side relatively peacefully in Bhutan, but at the same time have the consequence that rifts between people are created because different narratives about the past create different understandings of the present. The silence in Bhutan creates closed versions of the past: there is no opportunity to develop tolerance and mutual understanding (as argued in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). This is a feature unique to silence as opposed to the way in which open narration of social memories of conflict impacts on society.

I found that Bhutanese informants were not keen on challenging social memories. Some informants would suggest in interviews that family members might have memories that they chose not to share. But informants would not ask relatives about such memories (as discussed in 'Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: 'Plz Delete it from Your Inbox''). However, new political projects carry within them the potential for different versions of the past to be sought after (as argued in 'Piecing Together the Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict'). In that process alternative social memories may become part of mnemonic socialization. Social memory is thus not fixed, but adaptable under the right circumstances. Societal changes do not just carry the potential for alternative social memories to become relevant, but also the potential for linking past and present together in new ways as seen when the national dress is de-associated with the polarizing qualities connected to the etiquette in the 1990s (as discussed in 'Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan's Monarchical Democracy'). The polarizing qualities are not forgotten, but silenced based on contemporary aspirations, namely claiming membership of the Bhutanese community. The consequences that silence within and between social memories has

for the political culture should be understood as changing alongside society rather than being fixed.

5.2.1. THEORIZING SILENCE

The section above establishes how the four articles advance our understanding of access to knowledge and how diverse social memories can be a consequence of societal silence. To additionally demonstrate how the thesis contributes to the field of research focused on silence, this section will relate additional research findings back to selected parts of the literature review.

With its focus on silence, the thesis contributes to our understanding of this as a social phenomenon. More specifically, this thesis advances our understanding of: (1) how silence on sensitive issues can be broken; (2) silence as a method of enforcing censorship; (3) how silence can hinder society moving forward from conflict; and (4) how silence can be used by citizens.

(1) When informants classify certain issues as sensitive, silence is implicitly part of this classification. Silence is largely observed in public, but not necessarily in private where informants were found to break silence among people they trust. Hence, this silence differs from the cultural censorship identified by Sheriff (2000), who found silence existing in both spheres as a form of protecting oneself and others from emotional pain. However, it shares the trait with cultural censorship that it can easily be confused with an acceptance of dominant national narratives on sensitive issues. This thesis contributes with support for Sheriff's understanding of silence as something that can hide diverse levels of acceptance of hegemonic structures. My work advances our understanding of silence as a theoretical concept by pointing out that while silence can be a necessary navigational tool for citizens in hybrid regimes, there may exist culturally specific ways of breaking the silence. I suggest that – in line with Sheriff's concept of cultural censorship – there are 'cultural breaks of silence' available to people. The nature of such breaks will be specific to the culture in question and I suggest that researchers interested in silence as a phenomenon that shapes social and political life may gain insights by identifying these 'cultural breaks of silence' and reflecting on what the forms they take can teach us about the societies in which they occur.

(2) Sheriff (2000) suggests that theories of censorship struggle to account for silence in the absence of coercion or identifiable censors. My thesis advances our understanding of how this absence of coercion can play out when suggesting that silence can be a powerful communication strategy in a censorship regime. I suggest that silence can be a method of enforcing censorship. Coercion seems absent and it can even be difficult to identify a censor, but public silence is nonetheless achieved in Bhutan. If we only recognize censorship as a forceful and direct application of power, the realities of silence in a political culture like that of Bhutan are not fully

understood. The difficulty in capturing silence as a mechanism in censorship regimes is seen when applying Cook and Heilmann's model of censorship (2010). The model is geared towards the censor having a voiced attitude that censees can oppose, accept or be indifferent towards. Silence on a matter creates a situation where a censee's alignment with the censor is not a matter of communicating a similar attitude, but rather observing a similar silence. If working with a case where the censor's attitude is voiced, 'indifference' would typically be expressed in silence. The category of 'indifference' in Cook and Heilmann's model hence fuses with 'acceptance' in the case of Bhutan. The contribution of my research lies in recognizing that such models and theories can be criticized for neglecting silence and that they can aid discussion of silence if applied with modifications.

(3) While being suspicious of public silence, Passerini argues that silence may be a way to move forward in certain societies where distance from the past is needed in order to (re)establish solidarity in society (2003: 247). My work on how silence is experienced by those affected by the Bhutanese conflict of the 1900s advances our knowledge about how difficult this 'moving forward' may be in reality. Silence can create the illusion of society as having moved on from conflict, while there may be a yearning for acknowledgement, knowledge and resolution smouldering among certain groups in society. Neumann and Anderson (2014: 7) suggest that acknowledgement and knowledge are both vital to moving on from conflict. I suggest that silence has a negative effect on access to both of these. In Bhutan knowledge is limited by silence: there is little evidence of what happened during the conflict in the 1990s and there is no effort to collect the different narratives that may collectively paint a picture of it. Silence hinders access to knowledge on both a national level and in the smaller family units where informants are reluctant to open discussions on topics which are being intergenerationally silenced. While silence may be a way to move forward from certain events in society, my work challenges the idea that silence can be used to move society forward from conflict when some of the public still suffer from the consequences of it.

(4) In my work it became clear that silence can be actively used by citizens. Connerton (2008) suggests something similar when stating that forgetting can be fundamental in the formation of a new identity. In such a situation, Connerton (2008) argues that silence and forgetting should not necessarily be interpreted as a negative. In Bhutan, linkages between conflicts of the past and present society have been renegotiated by mnemonic socialization, but old understandings are not forgotten, rather they are currently silenced. The thesis suggests that it may not be forgetting but rather silence that allows the formation of a new identity. Thus my work helps disentangle silence from forgetting. Some informants who were marginalized and felt historically wronged wanted to move on from the past rather than expressing the strong connection to the past suggested by Tint (2010b). The thesis contributes with an example indicating that silence is not necessarily an instrument of oppression applied by those in power, but something actively used by

people themselves. Nevertheless, the thesis wishes to challenge the idea that such a silence should be understood as positive. While it is an active use of silence on the part of informants it is a practice born out of a lack of acknowledgement of the conflict and its victims.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

With its discussion of cross-article findings, Chapter 5 has been concluding in nature. This chapter will offer a few additional concluding reflections: a shorter answer to the overall question of the thesis; an overview of the contributions the thesis makes; and thoughts about the future of the Bhutanese political culture.

This thesis asked: what forms of societal silence exist in Bhutan and what consequences do they have for the political culture of the country? The four articles have each in their own way contributed to the answer of this overall question by drawing on empirical material and inspiration from anthropological fieldwork in Bhutan. Specifically, the article ‘Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan: ‘Plz Delete it from Your Inbox’’ has contributed to our understanding of silence as sensitivity and how obliviousness, self-censorship and silent protests play out in the political culture of Bhutan. The article ‘Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan’ has discussed silent diplomacy, the Bhutanese media’s role in silence and the online opposition against silence from Bhutanese citizens. The article ‘Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan’s Monarchical Democracy’ has contributed with a look at how the aim of social cohesion silences ethnicity and forces silent acceptance of uniformity in the political sphere. The article ‘Piecing Together Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict’ has illustrated how silence exists between diverse narratives of the past; this simultaneously lets some informants live in a peaceful society while others are experiencing continued conflict.

Additional cross-article insights were presented in the discussion in Chapter 5. I will not repeat the lengthy arguments here. Instead, I will offer the following short and concise answer to the overall question of the thesis: in Bhutan, societal silence takes the form of sensitivity, accepted silence, censorship, silent diplomacy and silenced ethnicity, and silence exists between diverse narratives of the past. The consequences for the political culture of these forms of silence are a lack of information, mistrust of authorities, silent protests, obliviousness, self-censorship, different understandings of the present, rifts in society and some citizens moving beyond conflict. Identifying these different forms and consequences is a way of deconstructing silence. It allows me to note two things about societal silence in Bhutan: that it is a multifaceted phenomenon that shapes the political culture in diverse ways, and that silence is something both Bhutanese authorities and citizens take part in.

With the exploration of silence the thesis has advanced our understanding of this understudied social phenomenon, which plays a role in shaping social and political life (Sheriff, 2000). Thus the relevance of the project partly lies in its contribution to our understanding of how political culture is affected by silence. The insights arrived at in this thesis can inspire the exploration of silences found in other political cultures, and serve as an example of how analysis of censorship can consider silence a significant feature. Discussing censorship and societal silences can be a way of exploring the nature of a regime that combines democratic and authoritarian elements in a hybrid form. To return to Pye's (1972) reflections on the concept of political culture, I suggest that explorations of political culture can benefit from considering the role of societal silence in imparting meaning to the political system, and the role of silence in maintaining the continuity of political systems and its significance for the political roles individuals perform in political culture.

Collectively the four articles have addressed gaps identified in the review of social science research focused on Bhutan. Specifically, the thesis has advanced our understanding of how the transition to democracy has altered the population's expectations regarding Bhutanese society; how *Driglam Namzha* influences Bhutanese society; how political culture is experienced, negotiated or navigated by the Bhutanese citizens; and how the conflict of the 1990s is part of present-day Bhutan. Thus the relevance of the project as a whole also lies in its contribution to the limited scholarship on the current political culture of Bhutan. The insights arrived at in this thesis have the potential of aiding further analysis of Bhutan's democratic development. They may also inform the exploration of issues related to the Bhutanese refugee diaspora, which is an avenue of research beyond the scope of this thesis. One gap found in the literature – the lack of details about the events surrounding the expulsion of the Lhotshampa in the 1990s – has only been addressed to a limited degree. Due to my informants' lack of first-hand experience with the conflict, addressing this gap has been beyond the scope of this thesis. I also suggest this to be an avenue for further research. However, a larger-scale project focused on collecting evidence and narratives from Bhutanese citizens about the conflict would face major methodological challenges and I doubt that it could be undertaken in the current political culture.

Improving the political culture is one of the major challenges that Bhutan's democracy faces. The hybrid nature of Bhutan may be a sustainable situation, but if Bhutan is aiming to move towards a more democratic regime, one of the challenges is to create a political culture where voicing one's opinion openly, and to those in power, is considered a real possibility by citizens. It is not just a matter of removing the authorities' power over the media or establishing a legal framework for breaking censorship. Rather what is needed is a change of political culture that convinces the citizens that voicing opposition is safe. This is a somewhat intangible challenge to overcome. I believe that the initiative for such change needs to come from those in positions of power because – as Hutt found in Nepal (2006: 362) – the powerful are

the ones who insist that certain things are beyond debate and questioning. Authorities need to abandon habits of silent diplomacy and the Right to Information act should be passed – to send a signal to the citizens that information is a democratic right. Sensitive issues need to be debated in public, including issues connected to national identity, citizenship, conflict and ethnicity. Diversity should be accepted and made room for in the democratic project, perhaps by rethinking the role of *Driglam Namzha* and acknowledging how the conflict of the 1990s impacted, and still impacts, on parts of the population. These are all normative suggestions for developing the political culture. But the suggestions are based on what my informants were hoping for and expecting democracy to be. These expectations are partly informed by education: my informants were receiving classes in college that often looked beyond Bhutan. Most teachers at the college had attended universities in other countries and brought ideas, ideals and inspiration from foreign countries into the classroom. In this respect, Whitecross's (2002) suggestion that education is an interesting component in the political development of Bhutan rings true. Additionally, some students would familiarize themselves with other societies through their use of social media and consumption of entertainment from abroad. Thus, my informants represent a new type of citizen in Bhutan, as suggested in the methodology chapter. They are part of a generation who have been granted civil rights from the outset of their adult lives. It is in the combination of this empowerment, education and cosmopolitan outlook where I see signs of change coming to Bhutan. The informants are aware that the political culture will not change overnight, but there is a growing discontent with the current situation. A development towards openness may be the only way to ensure that the democratic project is seen as legitimate and to avoid a repetition of the turbulent uprising in the early 1990s.

A Bhutanese proverb goes: “The wind never stops blowing and the river never rests” (Tshering, 2012: 19). The Bhutanese society is – as all societies are – in constant flux. New political projects carry within them the potential for new realities. As I am writing this concluding chapter of the thesis, Bhutan has just conducted its third parliamentary election for the National Council and by the end of the year a new National Assembly will have been elected. A new government may break silence on certain sensitive issues, share information more readily, take steps toward ensuring citizenships for those born and raised in Bhutan. Or the new government may do none of this and make no changes to the political culture. While acknowledging that the hybrid nature of Bhutan can be a sustainable situation, I believe that Bhutanese society will – in one way or another – move past the societal silences described in this thesis. I hope for the sake of my informants that the silence I found in the land of the Thunder Dragon will soon be peacefully swept away by the winds of change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Personal History Interviews

Appendix B. Interview guide from fieldwork, 2013

Appendix C. Checking my understandings during fieldwork, 2014

Appendix D. Interview guide from fieldwork, 2015

Additional appendices to the assessment committee's version of the thesis:

The article: Freedom of Speech and Silent Youth Protest in Bhutan – ‘Plz Delete it from Your Inbox’

The article: Silent Diplomacy and Requests for Information: What the Doklam Conflict Revealed about Government, Media and Citizens in Bhutan

The article: Driglam Namzha and Silenced Ethnicity in Bhutan's Monarchical Democracy

The article: Piecing Together Past and Present in Bhutan: Narration, Silence and Forgetting in Conflict

Appendix A. Personal History Interviews

I would ask key informants the following questions to help shed light on behaviour and attitudes. These questions were prepared during the first leg of fieldwork and used during fieldwork 2013-2015.

Basic information

- What year were you born?
- Where did you go to school from pp to class 10? And 10 to 12?
- Why did you decide to study X at Sherubtse College?
- What is your hopes regarding future work-life and private-life?

Family

- Where do your parents live?
- Who lives in your house right now? Who lived there when you were growing up?
- How many siblings do you have and how old are they? What are your siblings doing today?
- What do your parents do for work? What was/is the profession of your grandparents?

Culture

- While growing up, was there a mixture of ethnicities in your village?
- Is there a mixture of ethnicities in your village now?
- Did you ever hear anything about problems regarding land in your village?
- Did you ever hear anything about problems regarding citizenship in your village?

Politics

- Do your parents and other adults in the family discuss politics in the house?
- Did everyone vote for both rounds of the last election? Did you vote?
- What political issues, if any, does your family often discuss?
- Who would you say have had the biggest influence on your understanding of politics?

Appendix B. Interview guide from fieldwork, 2013

During the first two weeks of my fieldwork in 2013 I prepared the following interview guide for my focus group interviews:

Topic 1: Problems

- Every democracy in the world has challenges and problems. What are some of the biggest problems that the young democracy of Bhutan faces?
- In your opinion, what are some of the most important issues for the Bhutanese politicians to address?

Topic 2: Election

- This year you had the chance to vote. Did you vote? If yes, how was that experience?
- Do you think that the election campaigns were fair and respectful?
- During the election the election commission asked the parties to stop talking about issues “related to national security, national language and citizenship”. What was that about?

Topic 3: Sensitive issues

- Can you name a few sensitive issues for me?
- Which issues do the media in general shy away from?
- Has the democratization of Bhutan changed anything regarding what is sensitive?

Appendix C. Checking my understandings during fieldwork, 2014

Between my first and second leg of fieldwork I listen to all interviews and prepared the following overview where I anonymously quote interviews I had conducted. I would ask informants to help me make sense of the information by asking “What do you think about that?” (Note that this was merely an addition to the other interviews I conducted during the fieldwork in 2014.)

Democracy

- *“Democracy was given to unite us – instead it has divided us!”*
- *“The democracy is very authoritarian - we cannot question those in power!”*
- *“People don't want to go against the government because there might be consequences!”*
- *“We are allowed to protest... but no one has done it yet... we should do it!”*

Freedom of speech and press

- *“For certain discussions people have to use Facebook and twitter because the newspaper will not print such things”*
- *“There are secret informers between normal people... they report people if they say bad things about the Royal Family or other issues!”*
- *“The media in Bhutan is very restricted by the government – they will not allow sensitive things to be discussed!”*
- *“In Bhutan there is no freedom of speech!”*

Citizenship

- *“Citizenship and ID cards is a big issue in the South – but it is being ignored!”*
- *“Some politicians promised – in the election campaigns – that they will solve the citizenship issue... but actually it is not in their hands!”*
- *“The citizenship issue is hushed up... we only talk about such issues in closed rooms!”*

Conflict

- *“I guess we haven't found a way to communicate with the youth about the conflict of the 1990s – so mostly older people are aware of what happened back then!”*
- *“The movement that was causing the conflict is now totally subdued... but it may come back; people study outside Bhutan and become more critical towards things!”*

- *“Many people are suffering now because of what their grandparents or parents did 20 years ago!”*
- *“So many people are still deprived because of what happened in the 1990s!”*
- *“Those people left Bhutan voluntarily... they were not interested to be here... No one chased them out of the country!”*

Refugees

- *“Bhutan should consider the points of the refugees... they are also Bhutanese!”*
- *“The refugee issue is very sensitive – if we ask anyone about it, they will not answer us!”*
- *“The young people in Bhutan know about the refugee issue!”*
- *“If you want to know about the refugee issue you have to look in the internet... in Bhutan you will not find such things!”*

Appendix D. Interview guide from fieldwork, 2015

The following interview guide was printed out and kept in my field diary during fieldwork in 2015. In all interviews only a selected number of questions and topics would be discussed, and the questions were adapted to the situation / informant. I would roughly follow the following pattern, which was prepared before entering the field:

- **Individual interviews with students, discuss:** A, B, C, E and F
 - **Interviews with lecturers, discuss:** C, F, H
 - **Focus group interviews, discuss:** A, B, C, D and G
 - **Focus group interview with students attending Driglam Namzha training, discuss:** C
- A. On how secrecy is perceived, accepted and/or challenged**
- What place or role does secrecy have in Bhutanese culture and society?
 - Is secrecy part of the Bhutanese democracy?
- B. On how censorship is perceived, accepted and/or challenged**
- Does censorship take place in Bhutan? By whom? Of what and who? Why?
 - What kind of social media do you use and do you express yourself freely on those?
 - Have you ever experienced any act of censorship yourself?

- C. On how Driglam Namzha and Tsawasum is perceived, accepted and/or challenged**
- What are Driglam Namzha (DN) and Tsawasum (TS)?
 - What did the college teach you about Driglam Namzha and Tsawasum?
 - Do you know how to practise DN?
 - What part does DN and TS play in modern (democratic) Bhutan?
- D. On how concepts of security and sovereignty are perceived**
- Who have you heard using terms like ‘security’ and ‘sovereignty’?
 - How can “*disaffection among the people*” undermine security and sovereignty?
- E. On methods of intergenerational transmission of knowledge**
- Do older generations keep certain knowledge (about power, conflict and politics) to themselves? Why (not)?
 - Did your elders teach you anything about what not to discuss in public?
 - Did you elders tell you secrets (about power, conflict and politics) that they asked you not to repeat or discuss with others?
- F. On spaces for criticism of society, democracy and authorities in Bhutan**
- Is social media a space where Bhutanese voice criticism of society, democracy and authorities?
 - Are TV, radio or newspapers spaces where Bhutanese voice criticism of society, democracy and authorities?
 - Is there anyone in Bhutan who cannot be criticized? Why (not)?
- G. On the 10 year renewal of ‘Citizenship Identity Cards’ and ‘Special Resident Cards’**
- Can you tell me about the experience of getting your card when you were 15 years?
 - What does it mean to be Bhutanese as appose to one’s ethnic identity?
- H. On the political culture in Bhutan**
- How would you characterize the political culture of Bhutan?
 - How would you characterize your personal level of freedom of speech?
 - How does the state punish people? And why?



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